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Seventy-first year

Provisional

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Wednesday, 14 September 2016, 10.10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. McCully/Mr. Van Bohemen/Mrs. Schwalger	(New Zealand)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Lamek
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Arcia Vivas

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2016/768)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2016/768)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Australia, Canada, Germany, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Sweden and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Her Excellency Ms. Joanne Adamson, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

I wish to draw the attention of the members of the Council to document S/2016/768, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

I now give the floor to Mr. Yamamoto.

Mr. Yamamoto: As I look at the situation in Afghanistan today, I see opportunity and hope, but also formidable challenges. The progress made by the Afghan people over the past 15 years provides opportunities for further advances. With opportunity comes hope.

The challenges derive from almost 40 years of war. Despite very real progress, Afghanistan still has a long way to go to meet fully the needs of its people. The upcoming Brussels Conference could provide the time and space for the Afghan Government to move towards stability and self-reliance. The Government should seize this opportunity. In order to meet its challenges, the Government must be able to act effectively. The current precarious political situation, including the tensions between the two leaders of the Government, must be brought to a resolution. A way must be found to ensure stability in the Government for the long-term.

As one of the world's most aid-dependent countries, it will be difficult for Afghanistan to achieve self-reliance as long as there is conflict. The conflict diverts resources that would be better spent on developing Afghanistan and helping its people. Peace is therefore a requirement. It is imperative that avenues for peace be explored with the utmost urgency and seriousness. Let me briefly talk about positive efforts under way that give cause for hope.

Sustained international support to Afghanistan is vital. The Warsaw Summit sent a message to the Afghan people, including anti-Government elements, that the international community will continue to support the security sector at the current level until 2020. Afghanistan is now preparing for the Brussels Conference, at which the equally vital question of support for Afghan development will be considered. In Brussels, the Government will have an opportunity to secure ongoing development assistance at or near existing levels through 2020. At the meeting of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB) on 4 September, the Government demonstrated that its preparations for Brussels are well advanced.

I welcome President Ghani's comprehensive, long-term approach to tackling corruption, which seeks to develop the architecture needed to prevent corruption, as well as hold those responsible for corruption to account. The referral of the first cases to the Anti-Corruption Criminal Justice Centre demonstrates the Government's resolve. Successful, just prosecutions would go a long way towards boosting public confidence.

I also wish to acknowledge the Government's continued progress on other reform and mutual accountability commitments, in particular with regard to preparing the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework and successfully negotiating a new International Monetary Fund programme, after a strong performance in the area of the staff-monitored programme, including with respect to revenue collection.

These achievements establish a firm foundation for the Brussels Conference. By demonstrating the Government's commitment to development, economic

growth and stability, they can build confidence that development funds will used for credible, effective plans. I particularly welcome the inclusiveness of the Government's vision for the Brussels Conference. The Government's attention to poverty reduction at the recent JCMB meeting was widely appreciated.

Decades of conflict have left many women widowed and vulnerable, and as President Ghani noted at the JCMB, the face of Afghan poverty is female. Serious attention to poverty reduction therefore requires dedicated efforts to empower women in both peacebuilding and development. Government planning in those areas is progressing and a side event at Brussels will provide a valuable opportunity to discuss the plans in depth. Similarly, we look forward discussions in Brussels focused on promoting regional cooperation, which is key to the stability and prosperity of the region. Success in Brussels would mark another important step for Afghanistan towards self-reliance.

The National Unity Government faces fundamental challenges, both from outside and from within. Security and political stability are the most fundamental of those. On the security front, it has been another difficult year for Afghanistan. Intensive fighting continues in hotspots around the country. While Kabul has been the target of a series of horrendous suicide attacks, several provincial capitals, including Lashkar Gah, Tirin Kot and Kunduz city, have been under serious pressure, but none has fallen. The Afghan National Defence and Security Forces have been able to display more effective responses compared to last year, and coupled with tactical operations, they have been able for the most part to hold their ground.

The impact of the conflict on civilians remains severe, however. It is with a heavy heart that I must report that yet again, year on year, civilian casualty figures are trending upwards. Nowhere is this trend more apparent than for children, among whom there has been an 18 per cent increase in casualties, with 388 children killed in six months. The attack claimed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant against a demonstration in Kabul on 23 July was a particularly gruesom incident, with 85 civilians killed. The Government promised to investigate in full. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan will share the findings of its own investigation with relevant stakeholders.

I must once again remind all parties to the conflict to strictly abide by their obligation under international human right and humanitarian law to always place the preservation of human life above any other consideration and to give a measurable effect to their commitment to the protection of civilians, women and children in particular. Accountability for violations of these commitments remains weak and must be strengthened by all parties.

The numbers of people newly displaced by conflict have been swelled recently by a massive increase in the number of Afghan families returning from Pakistan. If current trends continue, Afghanistan will have to meet the needs of at least 1 million people on the move. That would require far greater amounts of assistance and would place an overwhelming strain on already overstretched health and other social services. Unless measures are taken soon, many thousands of families will face the prospect of winter with inadequate shelter or support.

No effective policies are possible if the Government is internally divided. Tensions within the Government have surfaced, with public criticism by Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah about what he views as the incomplete implementation of political agreement of 2014. The two leaders have met several times since then to try to identify the issues and to seek solutions. Efforts are still under way and further meetings are expected.

The National Unity Government is at a defining moment. A way forward must be found through a realistic and flexible compromise and a show of true statesmanship. The leaders need to come up with a solution that will allow for the effective functioning of the Government, in both the short and long terms. Afghanistan cannot afford political instability. The leaders must show the people of Afghanistan and to the international community that they are able to govern effectively.

As the second anniversary draws near of the 2014 political agreement that established the National Unity Government, the political opposition has increasingly challenged the legitimacy of the Government. The political agenda must progress constructively, political stability must be maintained and elections must take place. The recent signing by the President of the legislative decree on electoral reform is a constructive development in that regard. The international community is deeply committed to supporting the National Unity Government and would be reassured by continued stability and its effectiveness.

Peace for Afghanistan is a necessity. Without peace, Afghans will continue to suffer and economic growth and prosperity will not materialize. The Taliban has still not demonstrated explicitly a clear commitment to a peace process, despite the many offers of engagement by President Ghani and the international community.

The intensive fighting this summer has shown the conflict to be an endless cycle of gains and reversals, of destruction instead of development, and of continued suffering for Afghan civilians. It is my fervent hope that, as winter approaches and the tempo of the conflict slows, the Taliban will show their willingness to enter into talks with the Afghan Government.

The agreement being negotiated between the Afghan Government and Hezb-i-Islami shows that the Government is sincere about negotiations. Experience shows that peace processes can take months and years. Measures should be taken to build confidence between the Government and the Taliban in order to prepare the way for substantive talks. The sooner a process is started, the less Afghans will suffer. I would therefore urge both sides to come together to find lasting peace for Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has an opportunity to build on the achievements of the past 15 years and to move towards stability and self-reliance. With an effective Government and the continued support of the international community, it has every chance of success.

The President: I thank Mr. Yamamoto for his briefing.

After consultations among Council members, I have been authorized to make the following statement on their behalf:

"The Security Council reaffirms its support to the Government of Afghanistan and, in advance of the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan to be held on 5 October 2016, co-hosted by the European Union and the Government of Afghanistan, calls on the international community to continue their civilian and development efforts to assist the Government and the people of Afghanistan in a manner consistent with the Self-reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework and with the Afghan leadership and ownership.

"The Security Council underscores the importance of the progress attained by Afghanistan and calls on all political entities to work together to achieve a peaceful and prosperous future for the people of Afghanistan.

"The Security Council reiterates its concern about the security situation in Afghanistan, its condemnation of the terrorist activities by the Taliban, including the Haqqani Network, as well as Al-Qaida, ISIL (Da'esh) affiliates and other illegal armed groups, and its support to the Government of Afghanistan and, in particular, to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, in their task of securing their country and in their fight against terrorism and violent extremism.

"The Security Council also reaffirms its support to an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process with a view to achieving lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan and calls on all national, regional and international actors to cooperate in this regard.

"The Security Council reiterates its full support to the work of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in the implementation of its mandate as per resolution 2274 (2016), and to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

"The Security Council reiterates its strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Afghanistan, and reaffirms that Afghanistan's future lies in the building of a stable, secure, economically sustainable State, free of terrorism and narcotics, based on the rule of law, strengthened democratic institutions and the guarantee and enforcement of citizens' rights and obligations."

This statement will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2016/14.

I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Saikal (Afghanistan): At the outset, let me congratulate New Zealand for its successful leadership of the Security Council this month. We express our gratitude to the Secretary-General for his recent report (S/2016/768) on the situation in my country. We welcome Ambassador Tadamichi Yamamoto as the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General and thank him for his first briefing to the Council. We look forward to working closely with him and wish him every success in his very important task.

Since the Council's latest deliberations on Afghanistan (see S/PV.7722), on June 21, the country has seen increased armed clashes and suicide attacks, with high civilian casualties, which has tested our resilience and brought the peace process to an impasse. During the same period, thanks to the continuing support of the international community, we have maintained steady progress to enhance the capacity, capability, professionalism and sustainability of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF).

In the midst of vibrant democratic debates as a key feature of recent political developments, the reform agenda of the National Unity Government, in line with Agenda 2030, is bearing fruit. Afghanistan has achieved progress in regional trade and infrastructure connectivity, anti-corruption measures, governance, the rule of law and human rights, legal reform, restoring fiscal sustainability and the integrity of public finance, commercial banking, development planning, social inclusion and private-sector development.

During this summer, the world witnessed terror spread wildly across the globe, with major attacks in nearly 20 countries in three continents. From Libya to Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, Yemen, Turkey, Syria, Bangladesh, France, Libya, Mali, Germany, India, Angola, the Congo, Pakistan, Nigeria and the Philippines, terrorist attacks took many innocent lives and inflicted huge damage. It is clear that, as terrorist groups face international pressure at the core, they attempt to strengthen their symbiotic networks and resort to more desperate attacks far and wide.

Afghanistan has also seen an increase in large scale terrorist attacks. In June, Da'esh affiliates terrorized villagers in Nangarhar. A few days later, the Taliban targeted new police recruits outside Kabul. In July, Da'esh affiliates struck again, this time against a peaceful civilian demonstration in Kabul. In August, the Taliban targeted tourist buses in

Herat, followed by an attack on university students in Kabul. In September, they targeted civilians, security officials and an aid group in Kabul. Altogether, around 180 people, predominantly civilians, lost their lives and 435 were wounded in these attacks, with extensive damage to infrastructure. Among the victims were scores of our educated and talented youth who were committed to the rehabilitation and development of their country.

President Ashraf Ghani on August 25 called Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff and asked for serious and practical measures against the organizers of the attack on the American University of Afghanistan in Kabul. These savage attacks in populated urban centres showcased the cowardly behaviour of the terrorist groups and their supporters, aimed at compensating for their so-called spring offensive losses.

We have evidence that most of these attacks were orchestrated outside Afghanistan. Last week alone we seized two trailer trucks entering Afghanistan from Pakistan with 35,700 kilograms of ammonium nitrate, an amount nearly 20 times larger than what was used in the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995. Let us take a second to imagine the magnitude of the devastation had the attack, or attacks, been carried out against us or our allies.

Judging from previous experience, as we approach the General Assembly session, the second anniversary of the National Unity Government of Afghanistan and the forthcoming Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, the Taliban and other terrorist groups may escalate their attacks to gain international visibility.

The growing violent extremism and terror worldwide is proof that the current pace of counter-terrorism efforts is at best lax compared to the magnitude of the threat.

Current efforts remain scattered, slow and at times static, and they have proved incapable of matching the sophistication and ever-changing tactics of global terror for its eventual defeat, as far as the experience of Afghanistan is concerned. As a strategic imperative, we must move beyond rhetoric and address the enablers of terrorism, including the role of State elements in orchestrating and facilitating the growth of terror. We need to review the state of United Nations counter-terrorism efforts to identify and address gaps in their implementation and assess what needs to be done by the relevant United Nations agencies to achieve results and effectively fulfil their mandates.

The Taliban's brutal attacks have continued in different parts of the country, with particular focus on the provinces of Helmand, Kunduz and Paktia. Their aim is to create a durable political geography inside Afghanistan for the Quetta Shura and Haggani leadership.

The response from the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces has been remarkable. Successive Taliban and Da'esh attacks were repulsed in different parts of the country, which proves that these extremist factions do not have the capacity to hold territory anywhere in Afghanistan. However, we are putting in place measures to pre-empt rather than react to their attacks. I am pleased to report that in line with my Government's five-year national campaign plan, which focuses on reconciliation, security and stability, the mobility and effectiveness of our security forces have further improved Afghanistan's resilience in the face of the the ongoing security challenges.

Moving forward, the continued support of our international partners remains critically important. We welcome the outcome of the NATO Warsaw Summit last July, which extended the Resolute Support Mission beyond 2016, reaffirmed continuing national contributions to the financial sustainment of the ANDSF until the end of 2020 and enhanced our enduring partnership with NATO. We have committed to further strengthening our security institutions and ensuring service delivery within the rule of law. We will continue to increase our financial contribution to the ANDSF. The empowerment of women will continue in all aspects of Afghan society, including service in the ANDSF and political processes, as well as the full implementation of Afghanistan's national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000). We have already taken the necessary measures to protect children from the effects of armed conflict and have witnessed good, measurable results.

Despite our constant outreach and efforts in the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Process, Pakistan has yet to utilize the opportunity to play genuine peacemaker. The fact is deserving of attention that based on the Group's road map, they must take the necessary measures against irreconcilable Taliban elements to win the international community's due recognition as a serious and genuine partner in the fight against terrorism.

We thank the Organization of Islamic Cooperation for its renewed focus on promoting peace in Afghanistan. We welcome the upcoming Ulema Conference in Mecca and Medina, which will bring together global Islamic scholars to denounce the violence in Afghanistan.

On 21 September we will celebrate the second anniversary of the signing of the agreement establishing the National Unity Government of Afghanistan. We are committed to the full implementation of the agreement. Discussions are ongoing among the leadership of the National Unity Government to address the overdue commitments stipulated in the agreement.

Let me assure the Council that our entire political elite, irrespective of ethnic and linguistic background or political standing, is committed to preserving the national interest of Afghanistan, with its full support behind our national security forces. Developments, perceived by some as "tensions" in the National Unity Government, and "rising pressures" by political opposition groups, are part of a routine exercise of democratic debate and a hallmark of our vibrant society, where citizens express their views in accordance with their democratic rights. The 2016 World Press Freedom Index ranks Afghanistan higher than all its neighbours and fourth among 13 countries of South and Central Asia in terms of ensuring a culture of free speech. We will work to improve political stability through healthy dialogue over outstanding issues.

I am pleased to present the highlights of our achievements from the past three months. Afghanistan's development needs are being driven by our extensive reform measures to curb corruption, improve service delivery and promote transparency. Our collaboration with regional partners has resulted in projects that will transform the economic landscape of our part of the world. We have already seen the inauguration of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India natural gas pipeline project, the CASA 1000 electricity project and the Chabahar Port agreement, all of which present opportunities for regional cooperation on an unprecedented scale.

In August, we completed a major housing project of 2,015 residential units in Kabul. Additional projects are under way to provide over 11,000 residential units, with support from China and Qatar.

Last week, for the first time in the history of Sino-Afghan relations, a special cargo train between the two countries was officially welcomed in Hairatan, Afghanistan. Additionally, as part of the Khaf-Herat railway project, an Iranian train entered Afghan soil, thereby offering new opportunities for increased economic activity. Such developments reflect a spirit of constructive cooperation for mutual benefit in our region. We urge other neighbours to adopt a similar approach and to avoid measures that undermine

relations, such as the the closing of entry ports, trade blockades, shelling and illegal construction activities along our south-eastern territory.

We urge the Government of Pakistan to choose the path of cooperation to reinforce constructive relations and build trust, a fundamental precondition for peace and stability for both our countries. In that connection, we note with satisfaction the announcement on the completion of Pakistan-funded health projects in Afghanistan by year's end. As a principal component of our foreign policy, we are convinced that regional cooperation and multilateralism are catalysts for peace and prosperity. In that respect, we look forward to the upcoming Afghanistan-India-United States trilateral meeting, to be held on the margins of the General Assembly at its seventy-first. Let me inform the Council that President Ghani is currently in New Delhi on an official visit, and India has just announced another $1 billion in aid towards the development of Afghanistan. We thank India for that pledge.

The Anti-Corruption Criminal Justice Centre and the High Council on Governance, Justice and Anti-Corruption are already operational and reviewing Government corruption cases. Our judicial sector is being revitalized by a set of bold measures. More than 600 judges have been replaced, with 60 judicial officials being prosecuted for corruption and malpractice. We have also announced new appointments and conducted performance reviews to instil a culture of transparency in our State institutions.

In tandem with our economic achievements, our social sector is reaching new heights, with women increasingly assuming leadership positions at different levels of Government. There are more women in senior Government positions now than at any other time in Afghan history. Among them there are four ministers, nine deputy ministers, one governor, one deputy head of the High Peace Council and a number of senior diplomats at a leadership level. The Ministry of the Interior has opened six new child-protection units in police recruitment centres, bringing the country total to 13. We are committed to the protection of children and have prohibited security forces from using schools for military purposes. We are working on the national policy on civilian casualty mitigation, which will be adopted across all Government institutions to better protect our citizens.

However, mainly due to continual attacks by the Taliban and other terrorist groups, the number of internally displaced people has risen, especially in rural areas. Food insecurity and lack of adequate health care remain a challenge among that group, and the Government is focusing its resources to mitigate the crisis. Under the voluntary repatriation programme, the number of returnees has increased significantly. The number of Afghan migrants to Europe has also fallen, as compared to 2015. We are grateful to the United Nations and our international partners for the continued humanitarian assistance.

On counter-narcotics, despite some increase in the production and cultivation of opium, we are focused on continuing eradication efforts despite the security challenges. We are pleased with the outcome of the ninth session of the Regional Intelligence Working Group on Precursors, which, among other issues, identified next steps on the issue of precursor trafficking.

The forthcoming Brussels Conference on Afghanistan will be an opportunity to showcase to the global community our long-fought and hard-won achievements. The focus will be on the joint international and Afghan efforts to increase the effectiveness of sustained international support, multiple Afghan reform measures, including public finance management and anti-corruption, as well as regional efforts to achieve peace and economic prosperity. The preparations for the Conference are ongoing and we have presented the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework to our partners for their final input.

In conclusion, the global security scenario is undergoing significant changes, and Afghanistan's role in the fight against terrorism remains pivotal. We have long suffered at the hands of extremists and paid a very steep price through the blood and sacrifices of our people in standing up against it. Innumerable Afghans have been robbed of the promise of a peaceful future due to years of instability. However, in the past 15 years, the Government of Afghanistan, along with many of our international friends, including the United Nations, has worked hard to restore faith in the values we cherish — freedom, democracy, good governance, the rule of law and human rights for all. We look forward to seeing members of the international community at the Brussels Conference to reiterate pledges of support to Afghanistan and to refocus on the long road ahead in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism. A

win for Afghanistan in that realm would be a win for the world, and we would be safer and prosperous together.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand.

I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Tadamichi Yamamoto for his briefing. Mr. Yamamoto has assumed his role at pivotal moment for Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has been at war for far too long. Indeed, most Afghan people have no memory of anything but war. New Zealand speaks today as a country that has supported Afghanistan in its pursuit of peace and stability over many decades, stretching back to the withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989. Since 2001, more than 3,500 New Zealanders have served in Afghanistan. Some have lost their lives there. We have invested millions of dollars towards supporting Afghanistan's economic development and strengthening its security forces. And we are still there.

New Zealand's contribution is only a small part of the enormous investment made by the international community in Afghanistan's future over the past 15 years. But as we have heard today, sustainable peace remains a distant prospect. The Taliban and other extremist groups continue to pose an existential threat to the Afghan State and to conduct horrific attacks against civilians. The people of Afghanistan will require the support of international partners until the cycle of war and terror is brought to an end. That is why New Zealand joined others in Warsaw in July to reaffirm our support for the security and stability of Afghanistan. We extended the provision of military mentors to the Afghan National Army Officer Academy and funding to the Afghan National Security and Defence Forces. To take any other course would be to concede to the terrorists and accept the failure of the Afghan State.

At the same time, experience has also taught us that no amount of international support can by itself bring Afghanistan peace. It is time for an honest conversation about why peace is proving so elusive — and what needs to change. The future of Afghanistan ultimately lies in the hands of its Government and its people. Over the past 35 years, Afghanistan has been plagued by poor governance. Too often its leaders have prioritized group and personal interests over the welfare of their people, and resorted to graft and the use of force to achieve their goals. The formation of the National Unity Government, two years ago, with its reform agenda, was cause for new hope. It offered an opportunity for the country's leaders to put aside their differences and to establish a Government free from self-interest and corruption. But what do we see today?

Today we see a President and Chief Executive Officer whose relationship is dysfunctional and a failure to undertake the necessary electoral reforms to enable parliamentary elections to be held, thereby undermining the legitimacy of the current Government and sowing the seeds of future electoral disputes and instability. We see a Government that, two years into its existence, has yet to fill senior positions. And we see a host of promised reforms for improving governance and tackling corruption that are yet to be even seriously discussed, let alone implemented. Those failings are profoundly concerning. Continued division and dysfunction within the National Unity Government threatens the progress we have made together over the past 15 years. At a time when the international community is renewing its commitment to Afghanistan, we therefore reiterate our expectations of the Government in return.

First, we expect President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah to overcome their differences and to work together for the good of their people. How can a Government that does not talk to itself hold peace talks with others? We expect promised reforms to be implemented and serious efforts to be made to tackle corruption. We expect credible efforts to enact electoral reform, and elections to be held in a timely manner.

While prospects for a resumption of peace talks may be constrained in the short-term, New Zealand urges the Government to prepare for engagement on peace and reconciliation with all parties. As unpalatable as it may be, achieving a stable and peaceful Afghanistan is ultimately dependent upon achieving some form of reconciliation with elements of the armed opposition.

We also call on Afghanistan's neighbours and international partners to display genuine commitment to the process. The Taliban sanctions regime should be used to create, not obstruct, an environment in which talks can take place. The Afghan Government needs to take on more ownership of this process, which, if properly used, could provide leverage in its negotiations with the armed opposition.

These expectations of the National Unity Government are conveyed in the spirit of friendship

and partnership that has underpinned New Zealand's support for Afghanistan over the past 35 years. We remain determined to honour our commitment, but that will truly benefit the people of Afghanistan only if the National Unity Government does the same.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to other members of the Security Council.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by thanking you, Minister McCully, for agreeing to preside over this meeting of the Security Council. I believe that reflects not just just the importance that New Zealand attaches to this debate, but also the shared feeling among the members of the Council in our support of Afghanistan.

I would also like to welcome the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Ambassador Tadamichi Yamamoto, on his first appearance in the Chamber. The Special Representative can count on Spain's support, and I am sure he can count on the trust of the Security Council.

Allow me as well, as I customarily do — and I would not have it any other way — to associate myself with the statement to be delivered later by the observer of the European Union on behalf of its member States.

Today, we adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2016/14) on Afghanistan. That may be easy to say, but it is of great importance. First, that is because of the relevance of that instrument. We should point that the Council had not adopted a presidential statement on Afghanistan since 2014. Secondly, that is because this adoption underscores once again the unity of the Security Council in its support for Afghanistan, its Government and its citizens — something that is extremely important at this time. Thirdly, that is because of its timeliness. We are a few weeks away from what will undoubtedly be the most important international encounter for Afghanistan of recent years. I am referring to the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan to be held in October. At the Conference, the Government of Afghanistan will share with the international community its new National Peace and Development Framework, which is its strategy to continue its in-depth work on economic, social and institutional development in the country on the basis of the notable successes achieved in previous years. For our part, we members of the international community will have an opportunity to renew our political and financial support for those ongoing efforts for the benefit of all Afghans.

I would now like to refer to the political situation in Afghanistan, to which the Special Representative referred and which is the subject of the report (S/2016/768) of the Secretary-General. Spain supports the Secretary-General's call to all political leaders in Afghanistan to demonstrate responsibility and a spirit of cooperation and to always give pride of place to the common interests and the well-being of the citizens of Afghanistan as they try to find answers to the challenges the country faces. The upcoming Brussels Conference serves to highlight the necessity and importnace of such unity, both along the path to the Conference itself as well as in the period immediately following it.

Moreover, I cannot fail to mention the delicate security situation prevailing in the country. Spain adamantly condemns all acts of terrorism, irrespective of their justification, and we reiterate our support for the Government of Afghanistan in its fight against that scourge. Such actions will not succeed in dampening the determination of the Afghan people to bring about a stable and prosperous Afghanistan — a process in which Afghan women will undoubtedly be called upon to play an important role. I thank the Ambassador Saikal for referring to that issue in his statement.

As a delegation that is particularly committed to that issue, I would also like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his commitment to the women and peace and security agenda. In July, together with his team, he briefed the informal group of experts pursuant to resolution 2242 (2015) and gave us detailed and valuable information on the issue. We also welcome the commitments undertaken by the Government of Afghanistan in recent months, in particular the adoption of its national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000) and its national strategy on the elimination of violence against women. We encourage the Government to invest in effectively implementing them. The challenges are huge and much remains to be done, but this is the correct path.

We also welcome the fact that gender training for UNAMA personnel has been improved and that the leadership of the Mission meets regularly to develop and follow up on its women and peace and security

strategy as part of its efforts to ensure that its Afghan interlocutors give greater importance to the participation and protection of women and girls in Afghanistan. For Spain, that is not a side issue; it is central. That is why we also believe it is important to include strategic and disaggregated information on the issue in the regular briefings to the Council and in the periodic reports of the Secretary-General. The next UNAMA debate, to be held under the Spanish presidency, should be a good time to address the issue.

I do not want to conclude without reiterating Spain's support for the efforts towards a peace and reconciliation process led by and for Afghans. That is the only way to guarantee lasting, stable peace. To those ends, cooperation and coordination by all stakeholders in the region is essential — above all, there is no substitute for it.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): At the outset, I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his briefing and to express our full support for the important role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and all the United Nations agencies in supporting Afghanistan and coordinating the international community's assistance, in accordance with the mandate set by resolution 2274 (2016).

While Ukraine aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union later today, I would like to raise several points in my national capacity.

There were some encouraging signs of progress in Afghanistan during the reporting period, in particular in addressing the security, economic and development challenges faced by the nation. We welcome the efforts of the authorities in countering corruption and terrorism, addressing the fiscal gap and poverty and unemployment, as stipulated in the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework. However, the ongoing political tensions between Afghan senior officials over the lack of effective reforms, including in the electoral sphere, do not reflect well on the National Unity Government of Afghanistan. They can also affect the holding of long-awaited parliamentary and district council elections scheduled for next month. We call on the Afghan leaders to reunite and to focus on addressing the promotion of good governance, the rule of law, anti-corruption efforts and human rights, and on strengthening coordination between the security forces and law enforcement agencies to ensure that they can effectively tackle existing security threats.

Promoting a meaningful, Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process should remain a priority to achieve a sustainable resolution of the decades-long conflict in Afghanistan. We regret that during the reporting period no meetings of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group of Afghanistan took place, which is tasked with creatomg a conducive environment for such a process. Likewise, no reduction of hostilities occurred, as the Taliban rejected all calls of the Afghan Government to join the peace and reconciliation process. Moreover, there are alarming signs about the stalemate in the peace negotiations of the National Unity Government with some moderate armed groups and factions. An ongoing offensive by the terrorists throughout the country and recurring suicide attacks with improvised explosive devices in major cities continue to claim a high death toll, and are having an adverse impact on Afghanistan's political, economic and security stability.

As we see it, no tangible progress towards stabilization can occur without the readiness of other regional players to set aside differences and to exert influence on the Taliban leaders by depriving them of shelter and forcing this movement to renounce aggression against Afghanistan and earnestly participate in the peace negotiations. Regional cooperation should also be focused on finding ways to effectively disrupt the Taliban and other terrorist groups' financing by suppressing the narcotics trade and strengthening border security to prevent terrorist fighters travelling to and from the conflict region.

The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan continues to warrant our attention in the light of the ever-growing numbers of civilian casualties, especially among women and children, and the high displacement rates of those forced to abandon their homes and to seek refuge from prevalent human rights abuses, in particular against women and girls. The Taliban's recruitment of children is also a cause for great concern. Despite the announced national policy on civilian casualty mitigation, almost an equal number of the attacks on the civilian population are attributed to to anti-Government groups as to the Afghan national forces.

While taking note of positive developments on the gender equality agenda, in particular the elaboration of important legal policies, we would like to underscore

the need of ensuring the full implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security as a critical step in elevating women as full and equal partners in creating a stable future for the country. That is also the challenge in the context of the upcoming elections.

Given all those circumstances, it is essential to provide Afghanistan with appropriate military and financial assistance to achieve palpable results in confronting terrorist, economic and humanitarian threats and to secure a viable future for Afghanistan. Following the NATO Summit in Warsaw, which pledged assistance to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces through 2020, the international community should seize the opportunity offered by the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan in October to support State-building and socioeconomic development in Afghanistan, including to urgently scale-up humanitarian aid to address the needs of more than 1 million internally displaced persons and returnees.

Ukraine acknowledges the primary role of the United Nations in international efforts to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan and the valuable contribution of the relevant international organizations and institutions actively engaged in assisting Afghanistan. It is highly important to provide appropriate coordination for those efforts and to avoid duplication, including through making the best use of existing mechanisms for coordination.

Building synergies between regional organizations and further engagement with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe partner countries, particularly to tackle shared security threats, including those emanating from Afghanistan, is of high significance. A stronger partnership with those organizations present on the ground in Afghanistan can help us to better target and evaluate our activities. To that end, the valuable support of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and its regional programme for Afghanistan and neighbouring countries is of high relevance. With that in mind, Afghanistan-related issues should be further dealt with by a very broad spectrum of actors, while reorienting the policies in Central Asia to better reflect issues related to Afghanistan.

By adopting today's presidential statement on Afghanistan (S/PRST/2016/14), we are sending a clear sign to the Afghan people about the Security Council's full support of Afghanistan in its endeavours to address security, economic and development challenges. However, it is important that the Afghan Government proceed with the actual implementation of national reforms instead of issuing declarative statements. That will help to preserve the confidence of the whole international community and its readiness to assist this country in its struggle for sovereignty and territorial integrity, while creating a sound foundation for peace, security and prosperity both in Afghanistan and the wider region.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in Afghanistan. We wish him every success in his new important post. We carefully listened to the remarks of the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Mr. Mahmoud Saikal.

The situation in Afghanistan, despite all the efforts invested, does not evoke optimism. We note the deteriorating trend in the area of security. Fighting has intensified in various parts of the country. The elimination of the Taliban leader, Mullah Mansoor, has led to a strengthening of the influence of the irreconcilable radicals, first and foremost the Haqqani Network, which has served only to exacerbate the situation.

We are particularly concerned by the spread in the influence and the growth in the numbers of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and its drive to gobble up other armed opposition groups, mainly in the north of the country. If that process is not thwarted, then by next year we could face an even more redoubtable force. In that regard, we were surprised by the fact that in agreeing to the presidential statement on Afghanistan (S/PRST/2016/14)adopted today, our American colleagues refused to include into the text any wording on the growing threat of ISIL. Russia expects a more active use of force by the United States to suppress ISIL fighters in this country.

We strongly condemn the brutal terrorist attacks that have repeatedly struck Kabul and other Afghan cities during the past three months. We expect that the organizers of those crimes will be punished harshly, and that the Afghan authorities will undertake all the necessary measures to ensure security. We extend our heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of those killed and wish a speedy recovery to the victims.

We support the policy of the Government of Afghanistan aimed at achieving national reconciliation. We stand ready to provide assistance in making progress in the negotiations process, including on our flexibly approaching the issue of possible easing of the sanctions regime of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), on the Taliban, if this does not clash with the national interests of the Afghan State.

The main task in the reconciliation process, namely, to draw the Taliban into the peace negotiations, has not been achieved. The Quadrilateral Coordination Group format on organizing direct negotiations between Kabul and the Taliban has not been able demonstrate any positive results to date. A similar picture emerges in the negotiations with Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin, the Afghan extremist Islamic party headed by Hekmatyar. There is little likelihood of a resumption of direct negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan authorities by the end of the year.

We believe that the main responsibility for current developments in the field of security and the training of Afghan soldiers and law-enforcement agents lies with the United States and its NATO allies, which have not to date achieved the stated goals. Many tasks that were taken up by the International Security Assistance Force before the onset of summer remain uncompleted as well. We hope that keeping 8,400 American military personnel in the country through to the beginning of 2017, instead of the earlier-planned 5,500, troops as well as the agreements adopted at the Warsaw NATO Summit will lead to positive changes in the area of security. The key to a sustainable situation, in our view, lies in training and equipping Afghan national security forces so that they can independently safeguard law and order in the country.

Narcotics, manufactured in huge quantities in Afghanistan, threaten the stability of the whole region and beyond. The flow of opiates substantially fuels the financing of terrorism. It is especially important to step up the efforts of the international community in combating the Afghan drug trade.

We note the growing global understanding of the importance of the regional context for an Afghan settlement as well as the increase in the number of platforms focusing on this issue. We believe that it is important that in such platforms' activities regional players should play the decisive role. In that context, we believe that the Istanbul Process, which was also known as the Heart of Asia Process, must generate new ideas rather than duplicate the work of already successfully operating regional organizations.

We are convinced that efforts in assisting Afghanistan must make progress mainly through tried and tested structures, first and foremost of which is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). As is well known, Afghanistan is an observer of the SCO and has been so since 2015. In 2015, at the Ufa summit, it officially requested membership in the organization. To lend additional momentum to this process, we believe it would be useful at this stage to re-establish the SCO-Afghanistan contact group mechanism. Significant potential in bolstering cooperation in counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics also lies in cooperation between Afghanistan and the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

Mr. Lamek (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Mr. Minister, for your personal participation today and for your commitment on this issue of such great importance to the Security Council. Let me begin by thanking Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, whom I welcome as the new Special Representative. I think he is quite familiar with Afghanistan, and I wish him every success in his new duties. Finally, I would like to thank Ambassador Saikal for his briefing.

I, too, align myself in advance with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union a little later.

First of all, as we coming up to the second anniversary of the National Unity Government, it is important to note the significant progress made by the Afghan Government since September 2014. France reiterates its full support for the Afghan Government and encourages it to step up its efforts in favour of the development and stabilization of the country.

However, on the eve of the Brussels Conference, the international community's support for Afghanistan as it pursues this transition is essential. The role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in that respect is of course central. I wish to pay tribute to the work undertaken by all United Nations personnel in Afghanistan over the past 15 years. France is gratified by the fact that the Council has been able, through the presidential statement that we have just adopted (S/PRST/2016/14), to reiterate

that message of solidarity and support in a context that remains quite fragile.

Next, and we regularly refer to this point in the Council, it must be emphasized that the challenges that Afghanistan faces every day remain quite daunting. As the Secretary-General indicates in his report (S/2016/768), despite considerable progress achieved by Afghan forces, to which I wish to pay tribute for their commitment and courage, the ongoing deterioration of the security situation is extremely worrying. The recent attacks attributed to the Taliban as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province, or Da'esh, show that the situation remains fragile. France condemns those acts of terrorism in the strongest possible terms, and I would like, on behalf of France, to again express our condolences for those tragedies.

There are a number of difficulties in the economic area. The unlawful economy, corruption and the production and trafficking of drugs must be actively fought, for they are all obstacles to the sustainable re-establishment of security and development of Afghanistan. The development of economic trade with countries of the region and the international community should be encouraged. As Mr. Yamamoto told me earlier, this fragile context makes maintaining the unity of the Afghan Government all the more essential if the challenges are to be met. We call on the Afghan authorities to work to that end.

Finally, the concept of an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process remains more valid than ever, as no peace process can be imposed from the outside. Increased pressure must be exerted on the Taliban by those who possess any influence on them to provide every possible opportunity for a political settlement.

It is important that Afghanistan work closely with its partners in the region on a road map for a sustainable peace. France also calls on all countries in the region to actively and unambiguously support the stabilization of Afghanistan and to contribute positively to the restoration of lasting peace in the country.

The support of the United Nations, particularly through UNAMA, is crucial today, at a time when the flow of refugees who have been expelled from Pakistan is fraught with the risk of bringing the Government and the people of Afghanistan face to face with a very difficult humanitarian situation in the short term, and with reintegration issues in the longer term.

The NATO Summit in Warsaw on 8 and 9 July reaffirmed international support for security in Afghanistan for the next few years. The Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, to be held on October 5, should reaffirm ongoing international support for development, within the framework of mutual commitments.

In conclusion, allow me to reiterate my country's full support for the Afghan Government and for the actions undertaken by the United Nations in support of its efforts.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): I join other Council members in thanking you, Mr. Minister, for convening this timely discussion on Afghanistan. Your participation at this meeting, Sir, underlines New Zealand's deep and abiding commitment to Afghanistan and its people. I also wish to congratulate Mr. Yamamoto on his appointment as the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), as well as to thank him for his briefing. I would also like to thank Ambassador Saikal of Afghanistan for his comprehensive statement.

In the interests of time, I intend to focus my remarks on three key areas, namely, political and security issues; the protection of civilians, particularly children; and Afghanistan's socioeconomic development.

Special Representative Yamamoto's briefing and the report (S/2016/768) of the Secretary-General both clearly depict the persistent challenges in Afghanistan, especially on the security front. Despite that, we are encouraged that Afghanistan continues to show resilience in addressing the challenges and in making steady progress towards restoring peace and the rule of law. In that regard, we welcome the progress made by the Government in filling key executive posts, and the inclusive manner in which that task was undertaken.

The Government's commitment and ongoing efforts to hold parliamentary and district-level elections are also commendable. The various local peace initiatives, particularly the adoption of resolutions by representatives of provisional Governments and civil society on 20 July, committing themselves towards working towards peace in their districts, are other encouraging developments. The incremental progress achieved in implementing the reform agenda thus far is a step in the right direction and should be further

encouraged and supported by the United Nations and the international community.

The highly volatile security situation within Afghanistan, particularly the persistence of high-level Taliban offensive operations, causing the destabilization of many district centres, continues to be troubling. The midyear protection of civilians report submitted by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, which recorded 5,166 civilian casualties between January and June, clearly underscores the gravity of the situation. That figure marked the highest number of civilian casualties recorded by midyear reports since 2009. With respect to that unacceptably high figure, we are highly concerned at the significant increase in the casualty figures for children, which recorded 388 killed and more than 1,000 injured, marking an incrase of 18 per cent from the previous cycle in 2015.

The widespread use of children in combat, particularly by the Taliban, is abominable and must be strongly condemned by the Council. We also deplore and condemn the deliberate targeting of education and health facilities, resulting in the loss of lives, especially those of children. The Taliban and other perpetrators responsible for causing such a massive scale of death and destruction must be held to account. We reiterate our call on all parties to undertake the measures necessary to uphold their obligation to ensure the safety, security and well-being of all children in the country.

On a related note, Malaysia looks forward to the finalization of the Government's national policy on civilian casualty mitigation. Additionally, the issuance of directives to security forces, prohibiting the use of schools for military purposes, the opening of six new child protection units in police recruitment centres, the release of children from adult detention facilities, and steps taken to ensure the rights of children held on national security charges are all positive developments that will contribute to the country's long-term peace and stability. It is our hope that the implementation of those and other related measures will result in tangible and positive improvements in the security situation in Afghanistan.

The promotion of social and economic development is essential to the long-term stability of Afghanistan. In that context, we commend and welcome Afghanistan's accession as a full member to the World Trade Organization (WTO). Alongside ongoing cooperation with regional partners and the international community, including through the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, we believe that Afghanistan's WTO membership will open doors and boost prospects for further economic activities that will further improve the socioeconomic well-being of its people.

The commitment and efforts of the Afghanistan Government to improve governance and the economic reform process, including through the implementation of the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework for 2017-2018 and the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework, are important steps towards ensuring the country's long-term economic sustainability. This must be supported by the international community. We look forward to the upcoming Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, which will present opportunities for partners to complement and assist the country's reconstruction and development efforts.

While we agree that substantial progress has been made in Afghanistan over the past 15 years, significant challenges persist and threaten to reverse these hard-won gains. During this critical period, we call on all parties to demonstrate a spirit of cooperation towards achieving national unity and lasting stability. I conclude by reaffirming our full support for the commitment of the Government of Afghanistan and for the important role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the authorities towards achieving last peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to begin by thanking Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, for his important introduction of the Secretary-General's quarterly report (S/2016/768). I thank him for all his efforts since he assumed his post. We are convinced that he will continue to support the United Nations presence in Afghanistan and to address issues of importance to the United Nations and the Mission he leads.

I commend the Afghan Government for its efforts to strengthen its national institutions so that they can address the challenges they face, particularly with respect to security and terrorism. In that regard, I stress the historic ties between Egypt and Afghanistan. We must all come together in support of the National Unity Government, particularly because the scourge of terrorism is not limited to its various current

manifestations and affects all of Asia, reaching so far as the Middle East.

The report of the Secretary-General refers to the increasing danger posed by the presence of Da'esh in Afghanistan to the international community. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province continues to carry out its terrorist operations in recent months, despite the attempts of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and the international forces to suppress them. The head of that group was recently killed. We must continue, in the context of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, to fight and eradicate that group wherever it is found.

Egypt maintains its cooperation, dating back to 2007, with Afghanistan in the area of strategic training for the Afghan army and police, under the auspices of the Egyptian Agency of Partnership for Development. We hope to engage in tripartite cooperation in that area and that donors will provide the funding necessary to cover the expenses for that very important training. Egypt and Afghanistan also cooperate in other areas, including the fight against human trafficking and illegal immigration. Al-Azhar University also plays an essential role in promoting Islamic thought and moderation and the rejection ofviolence in Afghanistan by dispatching instructors to Afghan teaching institutions and providing annual study grants.

Egypt attaches great importance to the strengthening and political development of Afghanistan and, in the light of that country's key geographical position in the region, welcomes the various economic initiatives, such as the transfer of energy resources to the Central Asian region, the oil pipeline under development, and a dam that will help to enhance friendly relations and stability.

Drug trafficking represents a serious threat. We call on the Afghan authorities to combat such trade and to cooperate at the regional and international levels in the context of the war on terrorism. Egypt firmly supports efforts to develop Afghan society and restore infrastructure. We have answered the appeal to participate in the Brussels Conference in October, and hope to play an active role there in our capacity as a guarantor of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his briefing, and especially for his focus on both opportunity and hope. The United States welcomes his appointment and thanks him and his team for their sustained commitment to the Afghan people. I also thank you, Foreign Minister McCully, for presiding over this meeting and for New Zealand's commitment to supporting Afghanistan, including through your country's contribution of personnel to train Afghan security forces. We also thank you, Mr. President, for reading out today's presidential statement S/PRST/2016/14, which we believe accurately reflects the realities on the ground, in particular with regard to security and terrorism.

As we all know, Afghanistan continues to face grave challenges. But now is not the time for the international community to disengage from Afghanistan. To the contrary, we must continue to work with the Afghan Government and its neighbours to advance a more secure, prosperous and inclusive future for the Afghan people. Let me point out three essential ways we can do that.

First, we can redouble our commitment to Afghanistan's security. The United States condemns the increased attacks this year by the Taliban against civilians, humanitarian workers and the Government. The meticulous data collection of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has made clear the tremendous toll that that violence has taken on Afghanistan's civilians. According to UNAMA, 5,166 civilians were killed or injured in the first six months of this year — the highest six-month figure since 2009. Afghanistan's children are among the most vulnerable, as Special Representative Yamamoto just noted. Between January and June of this year, 1,509 children were killed or wounded. Behind those statistics, of course, are devastated and broken families left behind to experience suffering that stretches across generations.

Take 25-year-old Mohammed Hassan, a construction worker killed in a 23 July suicide attack claimed by Da'esh against peaceful Hazara protesters in Kabul. When Mohammed was a child, according to a family member, he lost his father to Afghanistan's former communist Government. Mohammed's death leaves behind a 5-year-old son and a baby daughter, another Afghan generation suddenly fatherless due to violence. As Ambassador Saikal noted, a few weeks ago the world witnessed the Taliban's brutality during the attack against the American University of Afghanistan, which killed 13 people and wounded nearly 50 more. The United States extends its deepest

condolences to the families of the victims. One of those killed was a law lecturer named Naqib Ahmad Khpulwak. As an undergraduate at Nangarhar University, he finished first in his class and went on to study here in the United States at Stanford Law School, where he served as a visiting student research scholar at the Afghanistan Legal Education Project and at Old Dominion University. He was about to start a doctoral programme at Oxford. Naqib returned to his country to help because he believed in it, and now he is gone. According to reporting, authorities told his family that he died while trying to help his students escape.

All of us need to step up to help Afghanistan and end this scourge. The United States is committed to helping Afghan security forces respond to such attacks and to counter terrorist groups. That is why President Obama decided to maintain approximately 8,400 United States service members in Afghanistan until 2017. As President Obama said,

> "It is in our national security interest that we give our Afghan partners the very best opportunity to succeed."

In recent weeks, the Afghan military and security services have conducted offensive operations across the country and thus far have held major cities in this fighting season. It will nonetheless take years for Afghan security forces to counter terrorist groups alone. That is why NATO allies and partners recommitted in Warsaw in July to help Afghanistan develop the capabilities of its security forces through 2020. The international community can further help to end the conflict and enable a responsible drawdown by helping to establish a peace and reconciliation process among the Afghan Government, the Taliban and other armed groups. The Afghan Government deserves credit for working to foster that process, and the United States continues to explore all avenues to bring the Taliban to the table. We remain open to exploring new opportunities to nurture regional cooperation once peace negotiations are under way. And we encourage Afghanistan's neighbours in particular to support the Afghan Government in its pursuit of a negotiated settlement. Promoting peace also means that all countries in the region must work to end safe havens for militants and terrorists.

One consequence of Afghanistan's insecurity is the challenge of internal displacement. Since early July, there has been a sharp increase in the return to Afghanistan of refugees and undocumented Afghans. We are concerned that some of those returns are not voluntary. Rather, refugees and undocumented Afghans are returning due to harassment, problems with local communities abroad and loss of opportunities for self-reliance. Afghanistan's neighbours must maintain their commitments to ensure voluntary and safe returns. We also encourage partners to consider funding the just-released United Nations $152 million flash appeal for refugees, which the United States is reviewing now.

Secondly, addressing Afghanistan's security challenges requires all of us to invest in promoting the country's political stability. Of course, tensions between President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah have made that objective harder to achieve. But establishing a more effective working relationship between President Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah was always going to be a challenging effort. Despite their differences, the two leaders remain committed to a vision of a more secure, prosperous and inclusive future for the country. Both entered into a political agreement to reach certain goals. It remains up to the leaders of Afghanistan to work out their governing arrangements. They must remain engaged and put the interests of Afghanistan first.

When they do, we see that progress is possible. President Ghani and the National Unity Government should be commended for taking steps to root out corruption. The Government has worked to reopen criminal cases against those who stole money from the Afghan people, remove corrupt judges and other public officials and establish the High Council on Governance, Justice and Anti-Corruption, as Ambassador Saikal also noted. Earlier this summer, the Government inaugurated a new Anti-Corruption Criminal Justice Centre, which is designed to shield investigators, prosecutors and judges from political pressure in sensitive corruption cases. If fully implemented, that will be an important step towards fighting impunity. We must encourage the Afghan Government to make similar efforts to resolve other pressing issues, such as electoral reform, and to follow through on its reform commitments.

Thirdly, turning to Afghanistan's development, members of the Security Council share a strong interest in making sure that the economic conditions are in place to promote stability. That is why we are urging countries to participate and make concrete pledges of development assistance at the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan scheduled for next month. The Conference will define the future of international assistance for

the next four years, through 2020. We recognize that Governments already made generous commitments to sustain security assistance to Afghanistan at the NATO Summit in Warsaw in July. But security assistance is not enough. Achieving stability in Afghanistan will require us to renew our commitment to address the dire need for education, health care and economic opportunity. And it will require the Afghan Government to renew its commitment to make the reforms necessary for international investments in these sectors to generate economic growth. Any precipitous decline in assistance will put at serious risks the gains that Afghans have achieved over the past 15 years. Members of the Council and the international community cannot forget that Afghanistan's security is our security. That was true in 2001 and it remains true today. When we commit to a more stable Afghanistan, we are committing to an Afghanistan that never again serves as a safe haven for terrorism.

There are many Afghans committed to forging a better future. One of them was Sami Sarwari, a young student who was starting as a freshman at the American University of Afghanistan this year. Sami Sarwari was a musician on a scholarship who was so talented that he performed at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., in 2013. Like many students arriving on university campuses this fall, Sami was looking forward to this new chapter in his life. And on Facebook, Sami checked into the American university of Afghanistan and posted "I'm in. Looking forward to a beautiful and bright future". He died a short while later when terrorists attacked his campus.

But Sami's vision is what should animate all of us here today. With our sustained support, we will keep working towards a more stable, democratic and free Afghanistan, the future that so many young Afghans, people like Sami, want to build.

Mr. Lucas (Angola): Mr. Minister, we welcome your presiding over this debate and the adoption of the presidential statement (S/PRST/2016/14) that you have just read out on behalf of the Security Council as a demonstration of the Council's support of and commitment to Afghanistan. We also welcome the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto. We thank him for his briefing and extend our praise and support to UNAMA and its personnel, who are working in extremely challenging conditions.

Two years after the establishment of the National Unity Government, the situation in Afghanistan remains unpredictable. Despite the remarkable advances registered in the past 15 years and the genuine efforts made by the Government to advance towards peace, stability and national reconciliation, much remains to be done. Among the many challenges facing the country, the fight against poverty, the implementation of political reforms, specifically the electoral system, and the security situation remain sources of the utmost concern. Tackling such challenges requires unity in the country's leadership, cooperation and a spirit of compromise in order to strengthen the Government's capacity to implement much-needed reforms for the benefit of the Afghan people.

Also of great concern is the increasingly volatile situation in the country, the persistent security challenges and the growing pressure from the political opposition, which the ambassador of Afghanistan describes as "part of a routine exercise of democratic debate and a hallmark of our vibrant society, where citizens express their views in accordance with their democratic rights". This is remarkable progress in Afghanistan's political development, to be maintained and strengthened.

The security situation has not improved against the backdrop of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces' engagement against the Taliban. Tersistent acts of violence by terrorists, including the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, suicide bombings and other forms of violence are the main causes of the ever-rising numbers of civilian casualties.

UNAMA's semiannual report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict in Afghanistan, released in July, sheds grim light on the number of civilian casualties victims of the conflict. The indiscriminate killing of civilians deserves our most energetic condemnation, and once again we urge all parties involved in the conflict to respect their obligations under human rights and international humanitarian law.

We praise NATO's decision, taken at the Warsaw Summit, by which its members and contributors to the Resolute Support Mission formalized the agreement on the continuation of the mission in Afghanistan beyond 2016, a crucial decision considering the intensified conflict in the country. It is widely understood that sustained stability and prosperity in Afghanistan are dependent on national reconciliation based on respect

for human rights and essential freedoms, on regional and international cooperation, mutual respect and non-interference in one another's internal affairs. The Afghan Government's efforts in reaching out to its neighbours and fulfilling its regional commitments, mainly concerning security and economic issues, are praiseworthy, as well as the Chinese initiative to hold discussions on counter-terrorism measures in the context of the Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism, comprising Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan, which resulted in pledges by those countries to strengthen coordination and information-sharing, including border management.

Insecurity and deep-rooted discrimination against women, in particular regarding their fundamental rights and freedoms, are absolutely unacceptable. We took note of the statement by the Ambassador of Afghanistan that

> "women [are] increasingly assuming leadership positions at different levels of Government. There are more women in senior Government positions now than at any other time in Afghan history".
>
> It is our hope that this trend will be irreversible and that women will occupy their rightful place in Afghan society.

We welcome the Government's efforts to combat violence against women and girls, and the approval of the strategy and the action plan on the elimination of violence against women for the period 2016–2020. We encourage the Afghan Government to effectively implement the measures laid out in the plan allowing women to exercise their legitimate rights and guaranteeing their protection.

In concluding, we wish to reiterate our support to the Afghan Government in this extremely difficult struggle against the forces of evil and darkness. The Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, to be held on 5 October and organized by the European Union and the Government of Afghanistan, signals the determination of the international community to pursue efforts to help the Government and the people of Afghanistan in a consistent manner to foster self-reliance and accountability. It is vital that the international community maintain its commitment towards Afghanistan, taking into account the fact that the future of the country depends upon the building of a stable, safe, economically sound State free from terrorism and criminal networks, with reliable democratic institutions guaranteeing the rights and duties of all Afghan citizens.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to thank the presidency of New Zealand for having convened this debate under its programme of work and also to thank Minister McCully for presiding over our meeting today. I should like also to thank Ambassadors Yamamoto and Saikal, respectively, for their briefings.

First, I should like to welcome the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Tadamichi Yamamoto, and to wish him every success in his work. We also thank all of the United Nations personnel working in Afghanistan for their dedication and stress the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in fulfilling its mandate under extremely difficult conditions.

Uruguay would also like to acknowledge the work of the delegation of Spain in preparing and negotiating the presidential statement (S/PRST/2016/14) that we have just adopted today. Uruguay reiterates its support for the Government of Afghanistan and encourages it to continue its efforts to move towards a lasting peace that is based on sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity. The instability and insecurity that prevail in the country continue to require the ongoing support of the international community to overcome the obstacles that it is facing in the political and security areas, which have a direct effect on its economic development. We deplore the fact that the political divisions seen over the past few weeks have put the Government's unity to the test. In that respect, we call on the country's authorities to act with the necessary leadership so as to bring about an agreement that will provide stability and make it possible to carry out the relevant reforms for the benefit of the Afghan people. International solidarity will also be required to that end. In the same vein, we call for sustained efforts to bring about direct talks between the Government and the Taliban that will create conditions conducive to peace in Afghanistan.

The October Brussels Conference on Afghanistan will be an important opportunity for the Afghan people to continue to determine their future and to achieve progress related to the strengthening of their institutions, the rule of law, respect for human rights, economic growth and reduction of poverty, among others. The support of the other countries in the region will also be critical to achieving economic growth and to addressing issues related to peace and security.

Security problems continue to beset the Afghan people and many armed clashes and suicide attacks persist. We regret that in only the first quarter, the conflict has killed or wounded 5,166 civilians. Uruguay is still deeply concerned over the humanitarian situation that continues to deteriorate with new internal displacements resulting from the conflict and exacerbated by lack of access. We regret that humanitarian workers have been wounded or killed and we deplore continued reports of limited humanitarian access.

Our country attaches particular importance to the secure and swift access of humanitarian aid to conflict zones, in order to avoid critical situations that prolong the suffering of the civilian population. In that regard, we note that blocking humanitarian aid is a clear violation of international humanitarian law.

As the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/768) indicates, displaced people continue to be extremely vulnerable. Food insecurity and limited access to basic services such as health, water and sanitation have exacerbated the existent health problems and malnutrition. Over the past 15 years, over 1,100,000 people have been forcibly displaced from their homes due the conflict, with 245,000 in 2016 alone. The levels of malnutrition are alarming, affecting 2.7 million people, including 1 million children under 5. Only 35 per cent of affected children receive medical attention, and only 25 per cent of those treatments are successful.

As such, the protection of civilians, particularly women and children, has become critical. That is why Uruguay believes there is an urgent need to respect their fundamental rights. We call for child education and the adoption of new legislation that will ban abhorrent practices such as child marriages and bacha bazi, also known as bacha bereesh.

As set forth in paragraph 34 of the Secretary-General's report, the Government continued its efforts to address violence against women and girls. On 11 June, the Government approved the 2016-2020 strategy and action plan for the elimination of violence against women. We hope that strategy will soon bear fruit and allow Afghan women to emerge from the stagnation and oppression in which they have lived for the past 30 years.

Uruguay reiterates its call to fully implement resolution 2286 (2016) on the protection of the wounded and sick, medical facilities and medical personnel, adopted on 3 May by the Security Council, which would be particularly applicable in Afghanistan as it makes difficult the work of medical personnel in charge of vaccination campaigns for the civilian population.

Finally, Uruguay wishes to thank all United Nations personnel and other humanitarian workers who face extreme security situations on a daily basis. We trust that their efforts in bringing aid to thousands of Afghans in need, while putting their own lives at risk amidst persistent abductions and attacks, along with appropriate Government measures will soon give rise to improved living standards for all Afghans.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): Let me first express my gratitude to the presidency for convening this timely debate. I would like to welcome the Secretary-General's Special Representative, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, who made his first briefing today. Japan looks forward to working with him and is ready to assist his efforts in any way possible.

As we have heard in the briefing by Special Representative Yamamoto, Afghanistan has seen some positive developments, but also has areas that require further improvement. We welcome the National Unity Government's continued reform efforts as the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan approaches. International expectations are high for the outcome of anti-corruption initiatives in support of the steady implementation of the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework.

Japan welcomes the Government's establishment of the Anti-Corruption Criminal Justice Centre. It is essential that the Center deepen trust between the Government and Afghan citizens, as well as between the international community and the Government, through increased transparency and reform.

Since the previous debate (see S/PV.7722) on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), in June, we have witnessed two major positive developments in the economic sector. The first is that Afghanistan achieved full membership in the World Trade Organization. The second is that the International Monetary Fund approved a $45 million three-year extended credit facility agreement for Afghanistan. Afghanistan's achievements on economic reform deserve to be highlighted. Afghanistan is striving to become an export-oriented economy, and we note that the National Unity Government has been focusing on expanding agricultural productivity. Agriculture is a key sector for generating jobs and income, and over the

past few years, Afghanistan has invested in irrigation and water management. Japan supports Afghanistan in exploring its agricultural potential as part of its efforts towards self-reliance.

Sadly, there is little good news about Afghanistan's political and security situation. On 23 July we saw the deadliest single terrorist attack in Afghanistan since 2001, while UNAMA reported the highest number of civilian casualties in a six-month period since 2009. Japan is also concerned by the continued abductions, assassinations and military clashes, as well as the Secretary-General's recent observation that tensions have increased significantly between President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah. The peace process is essential to Afghanistan's future security, but unfortunately we have seen no real progress in that area.

Long-standing trafficking in narcotics remains a persistent and dire problem in Afghanistan. Profits from the illegal narcotics trade flow to the Taliban and other insurgent groups, causing many negative consequences. Japan, together with the Russian Federation and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, has supported training programmes for counter-narcotics police officers from both Afghanistan and Central Asian countries, thereby simultaneously contributing to strengthening regional cooperation. However, there remains much to do in addressing the country's ongoing narcotics challenges.

Today, the Security Council adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2016/14) reaffirming our support for the National Unity Government. Japan strongly urges political actors at all levels to work together in support of a truly united national Government that can address Afghanistan's many difficult issues. We look forward Special Representative Yamamoto's leadership in implementing UNAMA's mandate, and pledge our continued support for efforts in Afghanistan going forward.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): I join others in welcoming Special Representative of the Secretary-General Tadamichi Yamamoto for his first briefing to the Security Council and thank him for his leadership at the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

It is sadly apt that we are holding this debate just a few days after the fifteenth anniversary of the 11 September attacks. It was those barbaric acts of terrorism that brought the focus of the world and of the Council on Afghanistan. Just 15 years later, that focus has perhaps faded, but it is undeniable that the country has been transformed. Yet it is also clear that Afghanistan still faces enormous challenges to its stability and security. That is why, 15 years on, my Government remains committed to Afghanistan's stability and development. It is why we announced at the NATO Warsaw Summit in July that the United Kingdom would increase its troop contribution to NATO's Resolute Support Mission, and that is why we have committed to provide ongoing financial support to the Afghan National Security and Defence Forces through 2020.

International support alone will not solve the formidable challenges Afghanistan faces. Unity of purpose and political cohesion are essential for security and stability. Let us therefore all support and encourage the National Unity Government as it pursues its ambitious programme of reform. There is much to do. Electoral reforms are critical to re-establish public confidence in Afghan institutions. Anti-corruption efforts are needed for future prosperit. And overcoming internal differences will enable the Government to deliver better services for the population at large. We recognize that steps towards reform are being taken.

We welcome the Government's efforts to address violence against women and girls, and the Special Representative's reporting on the issue. The United Kingdom will continue to support initiatives that empower Afghan women. Together, we must ensure that the historic, but fragile, gains on women's rights are not lost.

The upcoming Brussels Conference on Afghanistan in October will be a key moment for the Government to demonstrate its own commitment to reform. It is also the moment for the international community to renew its ongoing commitment to a more stable, secure and prosperous future for Afghanistan.

While we have seen progress in some areas in the early years of the transformation decade, many things still remain to be done. That is easy for me to say in these comfortable surroundings. My Government is well aware of the challenges posed by the conflict with the Taliban and other insurgent and terrorist groups. Therefore, we firmly believe that a political settlement is the only viable, long-term solution, and the United Kingdom strongly supports efforts towards such a settlement. In that respect, we urge the Government

to make every effort to create a broad base of support for constructive engagement with the Taliban. But until that peace is secured, the Afghan security forces must continue their vital work. I pay tribute to their bravery today. They are standing up to the Taliban and other groups across the country, staving off pressure in Uruzgan, Helmand, Kunduz and elsewhere, often at terrible cost. The United Kingdom is committed to help develop their capability, and we welcome the robust actions taken by Afghanistan to combat the emerging threats posed by Da'esh affiliates in eastern Afghanistan. The threats arising from those groups are very real, and united international support is needed in response.

Afghanistan's regional neighbours, as well as the international community, will also have to play their part to support peace. My Government believes that a positive, balanced and equitable relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan is of particular importance. It is vital that both sides engage constructively, while recognizing each other's constraints and objectives. Dialogue is important, especially at a time of heightened tension. In that respect, I want to emphasize the importance my Government attaches to an effective response to the emerging refugee crisis. We have witnessed a dramatic increase in refugee returns, flowing from Pakistan into Afghanistan. As highlighted by the Special Representative, the numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons are unprecedented, and the National Unity Government will require significant support from the international community to address the short-term requirements. It is critical, therefore, that an agreed action plan be put in place as soon as possible and that a longer-term approach be developed to address push-and-pull factors in both countries.

Fifteen years on from the terrible events that led to international intervention in Afghanistan, it is too easy to focus on the problems the country still faces. Yes, we are still some way from shifting gears from consolidation and stability towards development and economic growth. But we cannot lose sight of how much has been achieved. With our continuing assistance and support, we firmly believe that Afghanistan will emerge from these challenging times to enjoy the peace and prosperity that so many of us take for granted.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China thanks New Zealand for convening this debate on Afghanistan. We welcome Minister for Foreign Affairs McCully to the Security Council and thank him for presiding over the meeting earlier today. We also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his briefing, and the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal, for his statement.

Recently, the Afghan National Unity Government has made unremitting efforts at maintaining national stability, promoting national reconciliation and pushing ahead with economic development. Nevertheless, Afghanistan still faces grave challenges in the political, economic and security spheres. All communities in Afghanistan should step up their unity and join forces in promoting national reconstruction. The international community should also continue its assistance in support of Afghanistan and push for the early achievement of peace, stability and development in Afghanistan. I would like to emphasize the following points.

First, it is imperative to remain unwavering in the commitment to the general direction of national reconciliation. Achieving national reconciliation is the master key to addressing the problems facing Afghanistan. All parties in Afghanistan should focus on national development and the interests of the people by restarting peace talks. The international community should continue to step up its efforts and go all-out in support of an Afghan-led and -owned inclusive reconciliation process and make substantive efforts for the achievement of reconciliation in the country.

Secondly, it is crucial to ensure the irreversibility of the security situation in Afghanistan. Maintaining a stable Afghanistan in terms of security is of paramount importance to the development and prosperity of country. The armed conflicts inside Afghanistan and the terrorist activities by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and by Al-Qaida, among others, pose a serious threat to the security and stability of Afghanistan. The international community should support Afghanistan's national security forces in capacity-building, while beefing up their independent capacity for self-defence and counter-terrorism, and safeguarding Afghanistan's security and stability.

Thirdly, it is absolutely indispensable to help Afghanistan bolster its governance without let up. Matters relating to Afghanistan should ultimately be determined by the Afghans themselves. Currently, Afghanistan is engaged in preparing its new National Peace and Development framework. The international

community should, on the basis of the development strategy determined by the Afghans and the specific needs help the Government, improve administrative capability and consolidate the fruits of national reconstruction. All political parties and factions in Afghanistan should be committed to defusing their differences through dialogue and consultation and join hands in advancing the peaceful reconstruction process in Afghanistan.

Fourthly, it is imperative to ensure that the development process in Afghanistan makes further progress without backtracking. Promoting economic and social development is vital to safeguarding a stable Afghanistan. The international community should encourage and support Afghanistan in fully leveraging its advantages in resources and geographical location and push for progress in building infrastructure and developing trade and investment, among other areas. Meanwhile, it should also promote the development of friendly relations and cooperation for mutual benefit between Afghanistan and its neighbours, as well as Afghanistan's participation in regional linkages and communication and economic cooperation, so as to achieve full integration in regional development.

China is a good neighbour and good friend of Afghanistan. China supports an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation process in the country. China has taken an active part in various mechanisms, such as the Quadrilateral Coordination Group made up of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States of America, in an effort to create enabling external environments for the achievement of reconciliation. We are ready to link up China's One Belt, One Road initiative with the Afghanistan National Development Strategy. China is also hoping that the related international assistance mechanisms for Afghanistan will continue to contribute positively to the achievement of lasting peace and sustainable development in Afghanistan.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): Senegal welcomes the holding of this debate and we are pleased to see Minister McCully participate in it personally.

This debate, taking place in the context of the consideration of the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/768) on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace security, affords us a new opportunity to look into the situation in Afghanistan, which is more worrying than ever. In that regard, I would like to thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for this excellent briefing. I also take this opportunity to wish him every success in his new duties. Of course, he will be able to count on the full support of the delegation of Senegal.

Since our previous meeting (see S/PV.7722) here in the Chamber a few months ago, some progress has certainly been achieved in Afghanistan. However, we are forced to note, taking stock of the past threet months, that the political situation remains rather fragile, while the security situation continues to deteriorate. That has resulted in a number of difficulties in terms of human rights violations and also at the humanitarian level. However, fortunately, the combined efforts of the Afghan Government, its regional partners and of the international community, especially UNAMA, continue to attenuate the negative impacts of this complex crisis and provide us with a glimmer of hope.

Following the recent political and security developments, the situation remains quite concerning. At the security level, continuing clashes with the Taliban and other armed groups have claimed an unprecedented number of civilian lives since the United Nations started to systematically count the deaths in 2009. That has also led to a great many displaced persons, as indicated in the report under consideration, while armed clashes continue and suicide attacks unfortunately proliferate.

This unfortunate picture has been corroborated by the attack on 23 July against a Hazara demonstration in Khorasan province, which was claimed by Da'esh. Furthermore, prospects for a possible peace process with the Taliban have remained limited. Their determination to continue their attacks and to continue to expand their territorial gains remains almost intact. However, it is more important than ever to transcend the current impasse in which the peace negotiations between the Afghan Government and a number of armed groups find themselves. NATO's support to Afghan troops turns out to be crucial to weaken radical elements and prompt them to come to the negotiating table.

This is also the right time to encourage the Afghan Government in its efforts in favour of the protection of women and children, in a context where violations of human rights continue to take place.

Turning to the humanitarian situation, it remains more disquieting with the increase in the number of displaced people. We pay tribute to the humanitarian

community for its commitment in Afghanistan, where it continues its work to help impacted populations, especially the most disadvantaged and vulnerable segments of the population, sometimes at the very risk of their own lives.

Faced with such an alarming situation, we should welcome the continuing support shown by the international community, including NATO forces, and their continued cooperation with the Afghan Government. We also pay tribute to the spirit of cooperation and understanding that has prevailed between Afghanistan and Pakistan following the June incidents on the border in Torkham. We welcome the relaunching of regional cooperation in the diplomatic, security and economic fields between Afghanistan and its partners, such as India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the People's Republic of China, Tajikistan and the Russian Federation. We welcome the Afghan Government's continuing preparations for the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan planned for 5 October and the elaboration of its National Peace and Development Framework. We hope that the Conference will facilitate the process that has been launched aimed at achieving lasting peace and that it will lend momentum to economic and social development, which will require a bolstering of efforts in the fight against corruption, as initiated by the Afghan Government.

In conclusion, my delegation encourages the Government of Afghanistan and its partners and neighbours to step up their efforts in favour of a peace, which we hope will be lasting and to the benefit of all.

Mr. Arcia Vivas (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to begin our intervention by thanking the presidency of New Zealand for convening this debate, and Minister McCully for presiding over it. We also thank the Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his briefing. We welcome him and we support his commendable efforts as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for peace and stability in Afghanistan. We should highlight the work done by UNAMA, which has been essential to promoting peace, national reconciliation, regional cooperation and economic and social development. We would also like to thank the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, our friend Ambassador Saikal, for his statement.

The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is very concerned about the delicate political and security situation in Afghanistan, which poses great challenges for the country. As the Secretary-General points out in his report (S/2016/768), the levels of violence arising from the Taliban and other non-State actors have had great impact on the civilian population, which has been forced into displacement to other areas of the country in order to avoid clashes between armed groups.

The security situation has been adversely affected by the ongoing military operations of the Taliban, which have been carrying out a military campaign that has tested the Afghan national security system. In that regard, we note with concern how the statistics relating to armed clashes increased by 14.7 per cent between May and July. Likewise, the armed conflict in Afghanistan continues to affect the civilian population, who are the main victims of armed clashes between the parties. According to report, 1,600 people were killed and 3,575 were injured during the reporting period, the highest figure recorded since 2009. The UNAMA report indicates that women and children are the most affected by the spiral of violence. Since the beginning of 2016, we have seen an increase in executions of women by non-State actors. To this we must add the use of children as soldiers and the tragic toll of 213 boys and girls killed in fighting on the ground. In that context, Venezuela reiterates its call for the Taliban insurgents to resolutely join the peace talks. We support the statement made by the Secretary-General, which has been reported on several occasions, that direct negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan Government are key to this dynamic, but must not undermine the role of the international community in support of these initiatives.

We believe that strengthening dialogue and mutual trust among all parties is essential to consolidating peace. It is therefore necessary to redouble efforts in that direction, with the support of the international community. In this regard, we welcome the efforts of the High Peace Council, which has made progress in its programmes of action towards a national reconciliation strategy.

Afghanistan has also been destabilized by the presence of the so-called Islamic State, whose terrorist cells are a threat to peace and security in the region. In this regard, presidential statement S/PRST/2016/14, which the Council has just adopted, provides elements

to that end, while condemning the terrorist attacks of that organization, such as the latest in Kabul last July, in which hundreds of civilians were killed by terrorist acts.

At the political level, we call for the Afghan leadership to work on behalf of the people and thereby bridge the differences that hinder the achievement of the objectives set by the National Unity Government. In that regard, we welcome the achievements made in electoral reform, and recognize the intention of the Afghan Government to hire advisers to the President in various fields, such as education, security and internal affairs.

In the field of the political empowerment of women within the framework of resolution 1325 (2000), we stress the efforts of the Afghan Government in adopting the strategy and action plan on the elimination of violence against women for the period 2016-2020. We also recognize the interaction between UNAMA and the authorities of that country to strengthen protection services for women and eradicate violence against women. The establishment of centres to address this issue reflects the commitment of the Afghan Government in this area, and we encourage it to continue working in that direction. We welcome the progress made in increasing the participation of Afghan women in positions of leadership at various Government levels.

We emphasize that strengthening dialogue and cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan is necessary to contribute to stability in the region. We regret the fact that once again the report reflects political disagreements between the two countries. In that regard, we hope that they will be overcome for the benefit of their peoples. Common challenges in the political, economic and security fields require greater understanding on the part of the respective authorities in order to overcome the mistrust and problems that affect them. We welcome the strengthening of regional cooperation between Afghanistan, India and Iran, which continues with trilateral transport projects and transit that will facilitate trade among those States and the countries of Central Asia. The ongoing high-level visits to Afghanistan are a clear manifestation of this trend towards dialogue and the solving of problems of common interest to the region.

The Brussels Conference for the development of Afghanistan, to be held in October, will be of great importance to promoting the stability, security and economic and social development of the nation. We therefore encourage the international community to continue supporting the people and Government of Afghanistan by providing resources and building capacity to promote their development. It is to be noted that improving the security situation will favourably affect the country's political, economic and social dynamics.

Drug trafficking continues to pose serious threats to peace and stability in Afghanistan. The Taliban uses illegal narcotics trafficking to fund its terrorist activities. As indicated in the report, poppy cultivation and production in the country have increased, with the low rate of crop eradication being a most disturbing element, due to heavy fighting, particularly in the province of Helmand. In that regard, we welcome the joint efforts of Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, as well as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, to forge a common front against this problem in the framework of regional cooperation. We reiterate that the effective fight against drugs requires international cooperation, including that of neighbouring countries, to prevent, combat and eliminate this scourge.

Finally, we encourage the Government of Afghanistan to pursue its efforts for a comprehensive and inclusive political process leading to the establishment of a firm and lasting peace, to enhance its control over all its territory and resources, and to strengthen the State and its institutions on behalf of its people, who have suffered war and violence for so many years.

The President: The representative of Afghanistan has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I give him the floor.

Mr. Saikal (Afghanistan): I just want to make two brief points.

First, on behalf of my Government, I wish to officially thank the Security Council for adopting the very timely presidential statement S/PRST/2016/14, expressing its unanimous support. Secondly, let me thank the Foreign Minister of New Zealand, His Excellency Mr. Murray McCully, for presiding over today's meeting on Afghanistan. New Zealand is a true-blue friend of Afghanistan, and I am sure that it was in the spirit of such friendship that Minister McCully spoke so frankly in his statement.

However, with all due respect, the debate over governance in Kabul is an internal matter for Afghanistan, and we expect our friends and partners around the world to respect that and understand their limitations when it comes to the sovereignty of other countries, just as we respect the sovereignty of New Zealand and all other countries around the world. The debate in Kabul is for the sake of the political stability of Afghanistan, of which our international partners should be proud. We will have to address anything that could harm the political stability of Afghanistan.

Our two national leaders at the head of the Government proved themselves two years ago when, after a very lengthy marathon election, they came together and showed a great deal of statesmanship in putting the National Unity Government together. Of course, as we said from the start, this has not been an easy way; there is a troubled way ahead of us, but we must make it work. And the only way to make it work is to address the issues rather than ignore them. That is exactly what we are doing.

The President: I shall now make a further statement in my capacity of Foreign Minister of New Zealand.

I thank the representative of Afghanistan for his frank remark in response to my statement. New Zealand has indeed been a true friend of Afghanistan over 10 years of effort and lives lost in a very difficult period. The issue of the stability of the Government of Afghanistan is fundamental to the success of the international effort, and we look forward to working with Afghanistan to make things as strong as possible both for the international community and for the Government of Afghanistan.

I resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Lambertini (Italy): My country aligns itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union, and supports the statement to be made by the representative of the Netherlands as part of our cooperation related to the upcoming split term in the Security Council. We are currently defining our cooperation around shared goals and values in the firm belief that this agreement sends a positive political message of cooperation to tackle common challenges, of which the situation in Afghanistan is one.

I would like to begin by thanking the Secretary-General for his thorough report on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2016/768) and by expressing our appreciation for the action of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in this complex scenario. We offer a warm welcome to the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

The challenges Afghanistan is facing remain daunting. On the security front, the persistent increase in the number of civilian victims of the conflict is cause for great concern, and the data on children who have died or been injured is particularly alarming. The already serious humanitarian situation has further deteriorated due to the increase in the number of internally displaced persons. We condemn most firmly the terrorist attacks that continue to plague the country, such as those in Kabul in recent weeks. In the face of such unjustifiable and indiscriminate acts of violence, Italy reiterates its full support for and recognition of the efforts of the Afghan Government to combat terrorism and the actions of violent armed groups and to ensure peace and stability for the country. Against that background, on the occasion of the NATO Summit held in Warsaw in July, together with its partners in the Alliance, Italy decided to continue its active engagement in the Resolute Support Mission as a framework nation, assisting the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces to enhance their capabilities.

The past months have not seen encouraging developments towards a possible peace process, which nonetheless remains the main objective to bring an end to the violence in the country. Efforts to establish the conditions that could lead to an Afghan-led peace process must therefore be renewed. To that end, close and constructive cooperation among the countries of the region is essential. We hope that such cooperation will be based on the understanding that fighting terrorism and those who aim to violently to destabilize Afghanistan is in the common interests, as a peaceful and stable Afghanistan is essential for the stability of the entire region.

Another basic challenge for Afghanistan is that of strengthening its institutions and consolidating economic and social development. The upcoming Brussels Conference will be a key moment in the country's journey to self-sufficiency; to lower its dependency on international aid; to expand the progress achieved in the past 15 years in consolidating democracy, social development, access to health care

and the promotion of the rights of women and girls; and to address the underlying causes of Afghan migration flows, in particular towards Europe, while helping to improve security conditions. We are aware that, in order to achieve those ambitious goals, the financial support of the international community is decisive. Likewise, the achievement of the goals requires the utmost determination on the part of Afghanistan in pursuing the domestic reforms already initiated in that direction.

We appreciate the commitment of the Afghan authorities in that regard, as well as the programmes of action that relate to the Afghan National Peace and Development Framework and the updated goals of the Self Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework, which will be presented in Brussels. In the spirit of the principles of mutual commitment and mutual accountability, which support the partnership between Afghanistan and the international community, it is important that those reform plans be implemented concretely and effectively. That is what the donor countries are asking in order to confirm their assistance, but it is above all also what the Afghan people are asking for.

In the wake of the positive results achieved so far, it is essential that further concrete and measurable progress be reached in crucial sectors, such as the fight against corruption, human rights, the promotion of the rights of women and their full empowerment throughout society. To that end, close internal cohesion within the Government and effective teamwork are absolute prerequisites. We therefore hope that the differences that have recently emerged within the Government will be overcome, whilre renewing the spirit of national unity at its foundation in the greater interests of the country and its people.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): We thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2016/768) and congratulate Special Representative Yamamoto on his appointment.

The report of the Secretary-General paints a bleak and troubling picture of the security, political and economic situation in Afghanistan. We support the Secretary-General's call on the Afghan leadership to demonstrate a spirit of cooperation to achieve a meaningful agreement on the path forward for the benefit of the Afghan people. The unity of the Afghan Government is imperative in order for it to effectively address the multiple challenges that it faces.

The upcoming Conference in Brussels will be another opportunity for the international community to signal its sustained support to peace and development in Afghanistan. Pakistan will continue to support international efforts for the stability and economic development of Afgha..istan. But external support, although critical, cannot be a substitute for internal political stability. Among otner factors, that is contingent upon the successful implementation of reforms by the Afghan Government and the active promotion of peace and reconciliation.

The security situation in Afghanistan has continued to deteriorate with the escalation in violence and a significant increase in civilian casualties. That is a cause of great concern not just for Afghanistan's neighbours, but also for the entire international community.

The international community is unanimous in its view that sustainable peace is achievable only through a negotiated end to the war. Fifteen years of war waged by the the world's most powerful forces could not yield a military solution; a military solution is even more unlikely now. Nor should anyone expect that Pakistan will fight Afghanistan's war on its soil. Unfortunately, the Afghan parties themselves appear to have moved away from the international consensus that peace can be achieved only through negotiations. Neither side appears willing to talk, except on their own terms. Meanwhile, new actors are being introduced into the conflict. A dialogue between Kabul and the Afghan Taliban remains the only way to end Afghanistan's long night of suffering. Pakistan is willing to help in reviving the dialogue, as we did in June 2015, at President Ashraf Ghani's request. But that requires efforts by all four members of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Process — namely, Afghanistan, the United States, China and Pakistan. This mechanism remains an important vehicle to assist an Aghan-led and owned peace process.

Both sides are now threatened by the rise of Da'esh in Afghanistan. Several elements of what is known as the Pakastani Taliban — or the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) — have declared their allegiance or integration with Da'esh. It is therefore strange that some of TTP elements, allied with Da'esh, continue to enjoy the backing of Aghanistan's intelligence agency. Unless

peace is restored in Afghanistan, it risks emerging again as a central source of global terrorism.

My country has paid an onerous price for almost four decades of strife and conflict in Afghanistan. Pakistan continues to play host to the largest protracted presence of refugees anywhere in the world. Apart from Afghanistan itself, it is Pakistan that stands to gain the most from the restoration of peace across our western border. Pakistan's counter-terrorism campaign — the largest and most effective in the world, deploying a 180,000-strong force — has turned the tide of terrorism in the country. Unfortunately, though, we continue to encounter threats from TTP elements and its backers from across the border.

We call upon Kabul to ensure that its territory is not used by anyone to foment terrorism in Pakistan. To prevent cross-border attacks, Pakistan will fence extended parts of the border. If the Afghan seeks an end to such cross-border terrorism, it should support such fencing and strict controls at the international border. We will work with the Afghan Government through the recently constituted high-level consultation mechanism to address border and other concerns.

The path to peace in Afghanistan is arduous but achievable. However, it is up to the Afghan parties themselves to acknowledge that there is no alternative path to peace other than through unconditional dialogue and making necessary, although difficult, compromises to arrive at a negotiated settlement. The people of Afghanistan deserve no less.

The peoples of Pakistan and Afghanistan enjoy age-old bonds of kinship, faith and a shared history. Pakistan has offered unprecedented hospitality and support to the Afghan people over the past several decades of their travail and tragedy provoked by foreign military interventions. We have delayed sending back Afghan refugees yet again. We allow the transit of Afghan goods through our ports and over our roads. We also have displayed extreme forebearance in the face of unwarranted accusations from certain quarters in Kabul. We urge the Afghan Government to halt its belligerent rhetoric. That is in the long-term interests of its country and its people, as well as of the entire region. We stand committed to work with the Afghan Government for the improvement of this relationship on the basis of shared interests and values, and for the mutual benefit of our two peoples.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Thoms (Germany): Let me begin by thanking Mr. Yamamoto for his briefing. I wish him every success in his important posting at the helm of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and would like to reassure him of our full support.

Germany aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union.

While Afghanistan has made considerable progress in many areas over recent years, the security, and consequently the economic, situation remain extremely challenging. It is a matter of concern that the number of civilian casualties is on the rise. As the Secretary-General points out in his report (S/2016/768), the number of armed clashes rose by approximately 15 per cent, and the number of casualties among children increased by 18 per cent. The protection of civilians in situations of armed conflict is paramount under international humanitarian law. We welcome the Government's national policy on civilian casualty mitigation, which needs to be fully implemented.

It is important that the international community continue to give its full attention to the situation in Afghanistan. The Brussels Conference on Afghanistan will be a chance for the international community to once more underline its political and financial support for Afghanistan, while at the same time allowing the Afghan Government to present its achievements and the remaining challenges in implementing its reform agenda.

Afghanistan is Germany's single largest engagement in a foreign country, both in civilian and military terms, and we are conscious of the resulting responsibilities. Germany is committed to maintaining its support for Afghanistan. However, it is crucial that inclusive, effective and reform-oriented governance remain a priority beyond Brussels. This includes progress on electoral reforms to pave the way to parliamentary and district council elections. Also, economic reforms are of the utmost importance to counter slaw economic growth. The accession of Afghanistan to the World Trade Organization is an encouraging sign in this respect.

We encourage the Afghan Government to maintain its efforts to fight corruption and to implement the existing strategies in a transparent manner. Visible

progress in fighting corruption is a strong argument for justifying the exceptional level of donor support to Afghanistan. Development and security go hand in hand. In the long run, a peace and reconciliation process is the only way to long-term stability in Afghanistan and the region. Such a process can succeed only if it enjoys the united backing of all key stakeholders in the region and beyond.

Germany joins all of Afghanistan's friends and partners in a sending the clear message that we remain committed to supporting Afghanistan, in close cooperation with the Afghan Government and our international partners.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Bird (Australia): Let me start by joining others in welcoming Mr Tadamichi Yamamoto and thanking him for his first briefing as Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

The security situation across Afghanistan remains challenging. Recent violent attacks in Kabul, deliberately targeting Afghanistan's civilian population, are particularly concerning. We condemn the brutal tactics used by insurgent groups. In the face of these attacks, the Afghan people and security forces continue to demonstrate courage and resilience. Australia reaffirms its commitment to assisting Afghanistan in defending its people against the insurgency. We support the efforts of President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah to maintain the National Unity Government. Constructive working relationships and a shared vision across all levels of Government are key to managing Afghanistan's security and economic interests.

Australia supports United Nations efforts to assist returning refugees and internally displaced persons in a safe, orderly and dignified manner. We encourage Afghanistan's neighbours to support a manageable flow of returnees, enabling the Government of Afghanistan to respond effectively, particularly in the lead-up to winter.

This year, the international community continues to rally its support for Afghanistan with two major summits. The Warsaw Summit in July demonstrated ongoing international support for Afghanistan's security needs. Australia, alongside international partners, reaffirmed our commitment to Afghanistan. Together, we agreed to continue our support for Afghanistan's security forces, formalizing our commitment to NATO's Resolute Support Mission beyond 2016 and to providing sustainment funding at current levels through to 2020. The international community also welcomed President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah's commitment to reforming at Warsaw. We look forward to the presentation of the Government's national development strategy at the Brussels Conference next month, and to working with Afghanistan to implement these plans following the Conference.

At Brussels, the international community will focus on future support for Afghanistan's development. Australia recognizes Afghanistan's efforts in pushing forward key national reforms in difficult circumstances, and in particular we support its emphasis on economic growth, revenue mobilization, employment and countering corruption. We also welcome the Government of Afghanistan's support for gender equality, including steps towards implementing the national action plan on women and peace and security and the elimination of violence against women.

But huge challenges remain to ensuring that reforms made by the Government are felt by ordinary Afghans. We look forward to discussing the Government of Afghanistan's plans for development and addressing the needs of the Afghan population, including poverty reduction, basic service delivery, job creation and inclusive development.

In conclusion, international efforts in Afghanistan are supported by a strong United Nations presence, and Australia values the role that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan plays in guiding and coordinating international support.

The President: I give the floor to Ms. Adamson.

Ms. Adamson: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Armenia, align themselves with this statement.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2016/768). I would also like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing.

Let me start by reiterating our full support for the continuing important role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and all the United Nations agencies in supporting the Afghan people and in coordinating the international community's assistance.

Progress in Afghanistan in recent years has been remarkable but uneven, and requires consolidation in many areas. The recent political tensions amid the country's security and economic challenges highlight a persistent fragility. Political stability and predictability are essential. Preparations for the Brussels Conference require confidence that there is a stable political way forward well beyond October, with a need to compromise and to make concessions wherever necessary to ensure a viable and durable solution. This calls ever more for a long-term perspective and a realistic approach that acknowledges the huge challenges ahead of us. It calls for the sustained and predictable support of the international community, based on mutual accountability principles.

We are collectively committed and contributing to the stabilization of the region — in the fight against terrorism, against the illegal economy and narcotics production, as well as in trying to alleviate migratory pressures, which represent an increasingly growing challenge for neighbours near and far, including Europe. In this context, allow me to say that we deeply deplore the high number of civilian casualties in Afghanistan, which, according to the latest United Nations report, are at record levels. Improving security remains the single most important factor for stability and development in Afghanistan. Therefore, we welcome the commitments made at the NATO Warsaw Summit in July in support of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces.

Looking ahead, we are nowentering the final phase of organizing, together with the Afghan Government the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, which will follow three strands: substantial progress in Afghan State- and institution-building by effectively implementing the reforms of the National Unity Government; international support near or at current levels up to 2020, and increasing the effectiveness of aid in support of the new Afghan development framework; and regional support for a political process oriented towards stabilization, peace and cross-border economic cooperation.

We are confident that, by the time of the Brussels Conference, we will come to a joint vision and development framework for the coming years, on the basis of credible implementation plans. Following the recent meeting of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board in Kabul, the European Union and its member States welcomed the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework. This is a strategic document that defines future development priorities and guides Government and donors' development programming. Cross-government buy-in, effective implementation arrangements and timely results of this ambitious reform programme will determine its success, also in the eyes of the Afghan population.

The finalization of the new national priority programmes is one important element in this regard, as is an agreement on a new annex to the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework that defines clear progress indicators for the coming years. These policy documents pave the way for tangible progress in terms of poverty reduction and the provision of basic services and public goods. Mutual accountability is the driving principle. Continued exceptional but gradually declining financial support over the coming years will depend on such progress, including the necessary institution-building to maintain a stable society based on the rule of law and the consolidation of Afghanistan's democratic institutions, as well as a perspective for the already delayed parliamentary elections.

The fight against corruption remains a critical challenge, and effective measures leading to actual results are of paramount importance, as is the establishment of a reliable rule-of-law framework which includes civilian policing and a functioning justice system. They are a precondition for the respect, protection and promotion of human rights, in particular women's and children's rights.

On behalf of the European Union and its member States, I would like also to reiterate that joint State-building and development efforts in Afghanistan can be sustained only if they are built on reinforced regional cooperation. Development and security are interconnected challenges for Afghanistan's State-building process and need to be underpinned by genuine political support at the regional level. This also includes the increasing humanitarian challenges we face with the situation of refugees and internally displaced persons in Afghanistan and the neighbouring countries, notably Pakistan and Iran. We need to address together the growing pressure of migration.

Taking all three strands together, the Afghan reform agenda, a new development partnership and a new regional dynamic, a successful Brussels Conference will send the signal of a renewed and stronger partnership. A high level of attendance and clear signals for continued extraordinary support for Afghanistan will be important to convey a clear message that calls for tangible progress on the ground; a strong signal for economic reforms and inclusive growth, job creation and a much more business-friendly environment; a firm commitment to political stability; and a new dynamic towards peace.

Let me conclude by thanking Special Representative Tadamichi Yamamoto for his outstanding work in the past two years as Deputy Special Representative and by congratulating him on his new position. We wish him all the best for the challenging tasks that lie ahead of him. We look forward to continued cooperation with Mr. Yamamoto.

Mr. Lal (India): I thank you, Madam President, for having organized this debate. We thank the Secretary-General's Special Representative in Afghanistan, Ambassador Yamamoto, for his briefing and wish him well in his endeavours for peace in Afghanistan. We also thank the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal, for his important statement.

We offer our sincere condolences at the loss of lives and destruction of property in several recent terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, which killed and maimed hundreds of innocent people. While the Taliban's increased attacks and military gains in the country have been resisted by the Afghan security forces, these attacks have only gone up in the last few months, a trend which cannot be explained as simply a peak in the fighting season. The current efforts made by the international community to assist Afghanistan have clearly not been adequate.

We have noted the flash appeal issued by the United Nations to assist Afghanistan in managing and minimizing the huge humanitarian costs that an expected mass migration of more than 1 million people in a short period will entail in the midst of the increasing violence. The Security Council needs to find the means to reverse the deteriorating security situation so that the gains made by the people of Afghanistan in the last 15 years do not wither away.

Groups and individuals that perpetrate violence against the people and the Government of Afghanistan must not be allowed safe havens in Afghanistan's neighbourhood. We note that Afghanistan, along with the Resolute Support Force, has taken steps to eliminate the terrorist leaders who were operating from those parts of Afghan territory controlled by the Taliban and other terrorist groups. While the Afghanistan Government has made efforts to combat terrorism, others have callously looked the other way when Afghanistan is targeted by the Taliban, the Haqqani network, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, Al-Qaida, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed.

The effective implementation of the Security Council sanctions regime, including that established pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015), concerning the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities, as well as that established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), on the Taliban, is absolutely essential for it to serve as a strong deterrent to the listed entities and individuals.

The fact that the leader of the Taliban, a proscribed entity, is not yet designated a terrorist individual remains a mystery to us. Can we know the rationale for such an approach? Is it now the thinking that leaders of proscribed entities will not be held accountable for the deeds of the listed groups that they head? Is this how we intend to address one of the most serious threats to international peace and security?

Or will the response to our queries be a deafening silence, as was the case when the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), which deals with issues relating to Afghanistan, met last month, on 8 August? We are unaware of what was discussed and what was the outcome of these discussions. Are Member States entitled to know what this Committee, which acts on their behalf, considers and decides upon on for all of us? This appears to be one more instance of the secrecy practiced in the subterranean universe of the Security Council, which has now enshrined the principles of anonymity and unanimity to ensure a lack of accountability to Member States.

Afghanistan has India's full support in strengthening its defence capabilities and in preserving its sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, which is essential for the stability of the region.

India remains strongly committed to Afghanistan. The Prime Minister of India has conveyed to the President of Afghanistan, during his ongoing visit to India, our offer of an allocation of a further sum of $1 billion for the requirements of Afghanistan for capacity-building in spheres including education, health care, agriculture, skill development, the empowerment of women, energy, infrastructure and the strengthening of democratic institutions. India is proud, privileged and honoured that its engagement in Afghanistan, through our development partnership, has been a harbinger of hope and predictability, as conveyed by President Ghani to Prime Minister Modi earlier today.

We believe that the path to reconciliation in Afghanistan should be through a process that is owned and led by Afghanistan, reflecting the aspirations of the people of Afghanistan. India will continue to engage with the international community to assist the Government of Afghanistan in all possible ways in this regard.

We applaud the role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in providing assistance for Afghanistan in various sectors in this crucial transformation decade.

I would like to conclude by reiterating what Prime Minister Modi told President Ghani: "The 1.25 billion people of India stand with their Afghan brothers and sisters". India reposes its full faith in the brave and resilient people of Afghanistan and the National Unity Government for a peaceful, prosperous, stable, unified, sovereign and democratic Afghanistan as a land bridge between West, Central and South Asia.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to express my appreciation to New Zealand for having organized this debate on the situation in Afghanistan. My thanks also go to the Ambassador of Afghanistan for his statement. I would like to welcome and thank Mr. Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his briefing and for presenting the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/768).

Unfortunately, security and instability remain the major challenges for Afghanistan. The report refers to a 24 per cent increase in the number of armed clashes compared with the same period last year, while last year was reported as the highest number recorded since 2001 in terms of the intensity of armed clashes. This continuing deterioration of the security situation in the country indicates that Afghanistan and the region are no safer more than a decade after its invasion.

On peace talks between the Afghan Government and the Taliban, uncertainty prevails as concerns any prospect of making peace with them. Iran reiterates its support for any Afghan-led peace process; at the same time, we condemn all violent attacks committed by the Taliban and all other terrorist groups as well as any cooperation with them, since we believe that this will encourage them in their odious behaviour and thus be counterproductive to establishing peace in Afghanistan.

In my previous statement in June (see S/PV.7722), I warned about the emergence of Da'esh and its offshoots in Afghanistan. During the same period, we witnessed the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province (ISIL-KP) claiming responsibility for the terrorist attack against a demonstration by ethnic Hazaras on 23 July, which was the deadliest single incident recorded by the United Nations in Afghanistan since 2001. That is just another indication of the threat. ISIL-KP, along with a range of other terrorist and extremist groups, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, in the north, and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, appears as an emerging security threat in Afghanistan. Today, the Afghan National Unity Government is at the forefront of combating terrorism, but there is an increased need for the international community to provide sustained support to the Government in its fight against terrorism and extremism, as well as to address its security, economic and political challenges.

Strengthening our regional cooperation with Afghanistan is a priority and a major pathway to consolidating peace and economic growth in the region. During the past decade, Iran has spent millions of dollars to help Afghanistan to complete nearly 300 projects in areas ranging from infrastructure to training and capacity-building in human resources, especially through the hundreds of scholarships we offer each year.

Afghanistan and Iran continue to cooperate in those areas, following the 23 May trilateral agreement with India focused on the Iranian port of Chabahar. Coordination meetings at the level of the Governors of the border provinces were held on 25 and 26 July to discuss security and new trade opportunities involving the port. The Afghan Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs visited Tehran on 3 August for discussions on trade,

infrastructure and the presence of Afghan nationals in Iran, and the Afghan National Security Adviser visited Iran on 6 and 7 August to discuss border security and countering violent extremism. The fifth meeting of the Afghanistan-Iran Joint Economic Commission was held on 10 August in Tehran, following a four-year interval. Iran and Afghanistan are also committed to increasing their connectivity with emphasis on the Khaf-Herat railway, a 78-mile railroad project in Farah, and a second bridge over the Hirmand River.

Iran continues to provide its full support for the promotion of security, stability and comprehensive and sustainable development in Afghanistan, as we consider security in Afghanistan to be the security of our own borders and of the region as a whole. We support UNAMA and United Nations agencies in their efforts to provide development and reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan through the Organization's genuine commitment to a sustained partnership with the country, as set forth in final report of the Tripartite Review Commission on the United Nations in Afghanistan. The UNAMA mandate and its good offices should be used to strengthen national institutions and capacities in priority areas, as requested by the Government.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): In honour of New Zealand's presidency of the Security Council, I would like to use the Maori greeting "Kia Ora" to first address you, Madam President.

I align myself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union a few moments ago. However, I would like to underline the following.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands fully supports the statement made on behalf of Italy, also as part of our cooperation related to the upcoming split term in the Security Council. As my Italian colleague just emphasized, we are currently defining our cooperation around shared goals and values in the firm belief that this agreement sends a positive political message of cooperation to tackle common challenges here at the United Nations.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his detailed and thorough report (S/2016/768). I would also like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing. I wish him well in his new position. I would also like to thank my good friend, Permanent Representative Saikal, for his statement.

Today I will focus on three issues, namely, reconciliation and security, the Brussels Conference, and gender issues.

In our view, issues of peace and reconciliation are of paramount importance. We would highly welcome the swift signing of an agreement between the High Peace Council and the Hezb-i-Islami as an encouragement for other insurgent groups to engage in serious peace talks. The need for peace and reconciliation is underlined by the security situation in Afghanistan, as has been mentioned by many of our colleagues. The report of the Secretary-General states that the overall security situation has deteriorated since the beginning of the year, and it is the people of Afghanistan who have borne the brunt of violence and terrible atrocities committed by the Taliban and other armed groups.

Civilian casualties have increased are currently at the highest level since 2009, according the UNAMA midyear report. That has resulted in many internally displaced persons and refugees, as our Australian colleague just mentioned, and increasing pressure on migration, including through Europe. The intense fighting that took place in Tarin Kowt last week, which is a place of particular concern for the Dutch because we serve there, shows the fragility of the region and, in particular, its security situation. In addition, in Kabul last week, 41 innocent people were killed and more than 100 were wounded in the two major attacks that took place there. Our thoughts and condolences go to the victims and their families.

In our view, those developments demonstrate the urgent need to improve security for ordinary Afghan citizens. We commend the Afghan special forces and the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces for their competent and professional response in countering the Taliban and other insurgents. The international community, including the Kingdom of the Netherlands, has supported those forces for over a decade now, and we will continue to do so, as was announced in Warsaw.

We look forward to the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, at which the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands, Ms. Ploumen, will participate. We believe the Conference will be an important moment where the international community will renew, as it should, its commitment to the Afghan people.

We commend the Afghan National Unity Government for pursuing an ambitious reform agenda, especially with regard to tackling corruption and fostering regional stability and economic growth. All these issues require stability and the long-term commitment of both the Afghan Government and the international community. We now urge the Government to implement those ambitious plans without further delay.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework, which clearly demonstrates the resolve of the Afghan Government with regard to Afghanistan's near future. We look forward to seeing concrete action to implement the plan in line with the commitments under the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework.

With regard to gender issues, much progress has been achieved so far. Millions of women and children in Afghanistan now have access to basic services, such as education and health care. Women and girls are actively taking part in social life, and Afghanistan has experienced a sharp increase in girls enrolling in school. Let us not forget that this was unthinkable during Taliban rule.

At the same time, Afghanistan still faces many challenges in that context. The position of women remains precarious. Accordingly, we welcome the adoption of the Afghan national action plan on women and peace and security. The Kingdom of the Netherlands will continue to cooperate with the Afghan Government and civil society partners to expedite the implementation of the plan. Women are the cornerstone of society. Women need to play a crucial role in rebuilding the country. Women are crucial for peace and for the long-term sustainable development of Afghanistan.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of the Netherlands has been an enduring partner of Afghanistan. We have contributed significantly in the areas of peace, justice and development. We remain committed to supporting Afghanistan throughout the transformation decade — one of ever-greater Afghan ownership and Afghan leadership. In this spirit of partnership, the Afghan people can count on us standing by their side.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Blanchard (Canada): I am grateful for this opportunity to address the Security Council. Canada would like to thank the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan for its ongoing crucial work in Afghanistan, and welcomes the Secretary-General's latest report on it to the Council (S/2016/768).

I would like to proudly state that Canada has had an active development presence in Afghanistan for decades, and we remain committed to helping it achieve its development goals. As testimony to our commitment, Prime Minister Trudeau recently announced Canada's contribution to the next three years of Afghanistan's transformation decade. Between 2017 and 2020, Canada will provide $465 million, consisting of $195 million for security and $270 million for development assistance.

I would first like to emphasize that no development can be achieved without the active and substantive participation of all members of society, including women and girls. For that reason, Canada takes an approach favouring women's and girls' rights first in all of our health, education and human rights programming in Afghanistan. The path to a prosperous and stable Afghanistan is through empowering Afghan women and ensuring that their voices are heard and their rights protected. We are encouraged by the positive steps that Afghanistan has made in recent years to promote and protect women's rights, including strengthening their legal protection from violence, creating greater educational opportunities and increasing their inclusion in public and political life. But more must be done, and it must be done more rapidly. We believe that such advances for Afghanistan's women and girls will help to advance the rights, security, and empowerment of all Afghans.

(*spoke in French*)

Secondly, Canada is concerned about the deteriorating security levels in Afghanistan over the past year. The Afghan security forces continue to deal with considerable challenges from an armed insurgency that is active across much of the country. Canada remains committed to supporting the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and continues to emphasize the importance of increasing the number of women recruited into its ranks and ensuring the protection of women and children.

Thirdly, Canada fully supports an Afghan-led peace and reconciliation process and calls on the Taliban to come to the table to negotiate. It is vital to ensure that

the peace process includes meaningful participation by Afghan women. Canada's embassy in Kabul has been working very closely with the Afghan Government to make this happen through the appointment of strong, capable Afghan women to the High Peace Council. We thank the Government of Afghanistan for their commitment to the issue and reaffirm our desire to see a peace that can benefit the entire population.

(*spoke in English*)

Canada stands with the Afghan people as they strive for a more secure and prosperous future. We support the Afghan Government and its people in the face of challenging circumstances, and welcome Afghanistan's efforts to counter an escalating insurgency, broker peace, tackle corruption and much-needed reforms and pursue economic and social development. Those are tough challenges. But Canada is committed to supporting Afghanistan in its continued quest for stability, accountability and self-reliance.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Begeç (Turkey): At the outset, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2016/768), Special Representative Tadamichi Yamamoto for his briefing and Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal for his statement. I would also like to express our appreciation for the work carried out by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in coordinating the international community's support for Afghanistan.

As we leave behind the NATO Warsaw Summit and move towards the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, we are indeed at a critical time. We were pleased to see that the international community will continue with its security and development assistance to Afghanistan. We also welcome the dedication and determination of the Government, security forces and people of Afghanistan and their genuine efforts to overcome the many challenges they face.

As the Secretary-General's report shows, the security situation in Afghanistan remains fragile. The Afghan security forces' fighting capabilities and coordination skills are improving in the light of lessons learned. However, the insurgents are improving their techniques, too, and they remain a source of serious concern. In that regard, continued international support is vital. At the same time, the peace and reconciliation process should also continue to be Afghan-owned and -led. It is crucial to convince the Taliban to come to the negotiating table. We support the work of several mechanisms that have been established in various formats to coordinate efforts in that direction and stand ready to contribute to them.

In that understanding, we will continue our bilateral assistance to Afghanistan in the areas of security and development and our contributions to NATO as a framework nation, as well as making genuine contributions to the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process. In Ankara in June, as the co-leader country of the Counter-terrorism Confidence Building Measures within the Process, Turkey organized a course in critical infrastructure protection from terrorist attacks. We will soon finalize the preparations for two more events, on radicalization and the financial aspects of combating terrorism, towards the end of this year.

Before concluding, I would like to emphasize that Turkey will continue to stand by our Afghan brothers as long as our help is needed.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.